LITTLE FRENCH MASTERPIECES

Honoré de Balzac
From a steel engraving

Little French Masterpieces

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Honoré de Balzac

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Introduction

Honoré de Balzac

(1799–1850)

BALZAC'S short stories, which we call in French *nouvelles*, are, generally speaking, not the best-known or the most popular part of his work; nor are they the part best fitted to give a true and complete idea of his genius. But some of them are none the less masterpieces in their kind; they have characteristics and a significance not always possessed by their author's long novels, such as *Eugénie Grandet* or *Cousin Pons;* and finally, for this very reason, they hold in the unfinished structure of *The Human Comedy* a place which it will be interesting to try to determine. That is all that will be attempted in this Introduction.

Some of the stories contained in the present

volume were written under curious circumstances. In the first place it is to be noted that they all date from 1830, 1831, and 1832,[1] and therefore precede the conception and planning of *The Human Comedy*. Their value is far from being diminished by that fact. *An Episode under the Terror* (1830), for instance, was composed as an introduction to the *Memoirs* of Sanson — that executioner who of all executioners in the world's history probably despatched the fewest criminals and yet shed the most blood; and the *Memoirs* themselves, which are entirely apocryphal, are also in part Balzac's own work. But, though composed in this way, to order and as a piece of hack work, *An Episode under the Terror* is in its artistic brevity one of Balzac's most tragic and most finished narratives. *La Grande Bretèche* (1832) was at

[1] According to Lovenjoul, *A Seashore Drama* was first published in the fourth edition of the *Philosophic Studies*, in 1835. But this fact in no wise lessens the force of M. Brunetière's argument.—[Ed.]

first only an episode inserted among the more extended narratives of which it made part, as in the old-fashioned novel of tales within tales of which *Gil Blas* is the type; and brief as it is, Balzac nevertheless rewrote it three or four times. It is therefore anything but an improvisation. Yet no other of these short stories can give more vividly than *La Grande Bretèche* the impression of a work sprung at once in full completeness from its author's brain, and conceived from the very first in its indivisible unity. But, precisely, it is one of the characteristic traits of Balzac's genius that we hardly need to know when or for what purpose he wrote this or that one of his novels or stories. He bore them all within him at once — we might say that the germ of them was preëxistent in him befcre he had any conscious thought of objectivising them. His characters were born in him, as though from all eternity, before he knew them himself; and before he himself suspected it, *The Human Comedy* was alive, was confusedly moving,

was slowly shaping itself, in his brain. This point must be clearly seen before he can be understood or appreciated at his true value. However much interest a monograph on some animal or plant may have in itself—and that interest, no doubt, is often great—it has far more through the relations it bears to other monographs and to the whole field of knowledge of which its subject is only a fragmentary part. So it is with Balzac's novels and stories. Their interest is not limited to themselves. They bring out one another's value and significance, they illustrate and give importance to each other; they have, outside themselves, a justification for existence. This will become clear if we compare Mérimée's *Mateo Falcone,* for instance, with *A Seashore Drama* (1835). The subject is the same: in each case it is a father who constitutes himself justiciary of the honour of his race. But while Mérimée's work, though perhaps better written or at least engraved with deeper tooling, is after all nothing but an anecdote, a sensational news-

item, a story of local manners, Balzac's is bound up with a whole mass of ideas, not to say a whole social philosophy, of which it is, properly speaking, only a *chapter;* and of which *The Conscript* (1831) is another.

But why did Balzac confine some of his subjects within the narrow limits of the *nouvelle,* while he expanded others to the dimensions of epic, we might say, or of history? It was because, though analogies are numerous between natural history and what we may call social history or the natural history of society, yet their resemblance is not complete nor their identity absolute. There are peculiarities or variations of passion which, though physiologically or pathologically interesting, are *socially* insignificant and can be left out of account: for instance, *A Passion in the Desert* (1830), or *The Unknown Masterpiece* (1831). It is rare, in art, for the passionate pursuit of progress to result only, as with Frenhofer, in jumbling the colours on a great painter's canvas; and, even were this less rare,

artists are not very numerous! So, if the writer gave to his narrative of this painful but infrequent adventure as full a development, if he diversified and complicated it with as many episodes and details as the adventures of Baron Hulot in *Cousin Bette* or those of Madame de Mortsauf in *The Lily in the Valley,* he would thereby attribute to it, *socially* or *historically,* an importance it does not possess. He would err, and would make us err with him, regarding the true proportions of things. He would represent the humanity which he was attempting to depict, in a manner far from consistent with reality. Hence may be deduced the æsthetics of the *nouvelle,* and its distinction from the *conte,* and also from the *roman* or novel.

The *nouvelle* differs from the *conte* in that it always claims to be a picture of ordinary life; and it differs from the novel in that it selects from ordinary life, and depicts by preference and almost exclusively, those examples of the strange, the rare, and the extraordinary

which ordinary life does in spite of its monotony nevertheless contain. It is neither strange nor rare for a miser to make all the people about him, including his wife and children, victims of the passion to which he is himself enslaved; and that is the subject of *Eugénie Grandet.* It is nothing extraordinary for parents of humble origin to be almost disowned by their children whom they have married too far above them, in another class of society; and that is the subject of *Father Goriot.* But for a husband, as in *La Grande Bretèche,* to wall up his wife's lover in a closet, and that before her very eyes; and, through a combination of circumstances in themselves quite out of the ordinary, for neither one of them to dare or be able to make any defence against his vengeance — this is certainly somewhat rare! Then read *The Conscript,* or *An Episode under the Terror;* the plot is no ordinary one, and perhaps, with a little exaggeration, we may say it can have occurred but once. Such, then, is the field of the

nouvelle. Let us set off from it the fantastic, in the style of Hoffmann or Edgar Allan Poe, even though Balzac sometimes tried that also, as in *The Wild Ass's Skin,* for instance, or in *Melmoth Converted;* for the fantastic belongs to the field of the *conte.* But unusual events, especially such as result from an unforeseen combination of circumstances; and really tragic adventures, which, like Monsieur and Madame de Merret's in *La Grande Bretèche* or Cambremer's in *A Seashore Drama,* make human conscience hesitate to call the crime by its name; and illogical variations, deviations, or perversions of passion; and the pathology of feeling, as in *The Unknown Masterpiece;* and still more generally, if I may so express myself, all those things in life which are out of the usual run of life, which happen *on its margin,* and so are beside yet not outside it; all that makes its surprises, its differences, its *startlingness,* so to speak — all this is the province of the *nouvelle,* bordering on that of the novel yet distinct from it. Out of common

every-day life you cannot really make *nouvelles,* but only novels—miniature novels, when they are brief, but still novels. In no French writer of the last century, I think, is this distinction more evident or more strictly observed than it is in *The Human Comedy;* and unless I am much mistaken, this may serve to solve, or at least to throw light on, the vexed question of Honoré de Balzac's *naturalism* or *romanticism.*

In the literal and even the etymological sense of the word *naturalism* — that is, without taking account of the way in which Émile Zola and some other Italians have *perverted its nature* — no one can question that Balzac was a naturalist. One might as well deny that Victor Hugo was a romanticist! Everybody to-day knows that neither the freedom of his vocabulary, nor some very detailed descriptions in *Notre Dame de Paris* and especially in *Les Misérables,* nor his coarse popular jokes, often in doubtful taste if not sometimes worse, nor yet the interest in social questions which

characterised him from the very first — that nothing of all this, I say, prevents Victor Hugo from having been, up to the day of his death, *the* romanticist; we may rest assured that in whatever way romanticism shall be defined, he will always be, in the history of French literature, its living incarnation. Balzac, on the other hand, will always be the living incarnation of naturalism. And surely, if to be a naturalist is to confine the field of one's art to the observation of contemporary life, and to try to give a complete and adequate representation thereof, not drawing back or hesitating, not abating one tittle of the truth, in the depiction of ugliness and vice; if to be a naturalist is, like a portrait-painter, to subordinate every æsthetic and moral consideration to the law of likeness — then it is impossible to be more of a naturalist than Balzac. But with all this, since his imagination is unruly, capricious, changeable, with a strong tendency to exaggeration, audacious, and corrupt; since he, as much as any of his

contemporaries, feels the need of startling us; since he habitually writes under the dominion of a kind of hallucinatory fever sufficient of itself to mark what we may call the romantic state of mind — romanticism is certainly not absent from the work of this naturalist, but on the contrary would fill and inspire the whole of it, were that result not prevented by the claims, or conditions, of observation. A romantic imagination, struggling to triumph over itself, and succeeding only by confining itself to the study of the model — such may be the definition of Balzac's imagination or genius; and, in a way, to justify this definition by his work we need only to distinguish clearly his *nouvelles* from his novels.

Balzac's *nouvelles* represent the share of romanticism in his work. *La Grande Bretèche* is the typical romantic narrative, and we may say as much of *The Unknown Masterpiece.* The observer shuts his eyes; he now looks only within himself; he imagines "what might have been"; and he writes *An*

Episode under the Terror. It is for him a way of escape from the obsession of the real:

"The real is strait; the possible is vast."

His unbridled imagination takes free course. He works in dream. And, since of course we can never succeed in building within ourselves perfectly water-tight compartments, entirely separating dream from memory and imagination from observation, reality does find its way into his *nouvelles* by way of exactness in detail, but their conception remains essentially or chiefly romantic; just as in his long novels, *Eugénie Grandet, A Bachelor's Establishment* (*Un Ménage de Garçon*), *César Birotteau, A Dark Affair, Cousin Pons*, and *Cousin Bette,* his observation remains naturalistic, and his imagination perverts it, by magnifying or exaggerating, yet never intentionally or systematically or to the extent of falsifying the true relations of things. Shall I dare say, to English readers, that by this fact he belongs to the family of Shakes-

peare? His long novels are his *Othello,* his *Romeo,* his *Macbeth,* his *Richard III.,* and *Coriolanus;* and his *nouvelles,* his short stories, are his *Tempest,* his *Twelfth Night,* and his *Midsummer Night's Dream.*

This comparison, which really is not a comparison but a mere analogy, such as might be drawn between Musset and Byron, may serve to bring out one more characteristic of Balzac's *nouvelles* — they are philosophic; in his *The Human Comedy* it is under the title of *Philosophic Studies* that he brought together, whatever their origin, such stories as *A Seashore Drama, The Unknown Masterpiece,* and even *The Conscript.* By so doing he no doubt meant to imply that the sensational stories on which they are based did not contain their whole significance; that he was using them merely as a means of stating a problem, of fixing the reader's attention for a moment on the vastness of the mysterious or unknown by which we are, so to speak, enwrapped about. "We

might add this tragic story," he writes at the end of his *The Conscript,* "to the mass of other observations on that sympathy which defies the law of space — a body of evidence which some few solitary scholars are collecting with scientific curiosity, and which will one day serve as basis for a new science, a science which till now has lacked only its man of genius." These are large words, it would seem, with which to point the moral of a mere historical anecdote. But if we consider them well, we shall see that, whatever we may think of this "new science," Balzac wrote his *The Conscript* for the sole purpose of ending it with that sentence. Read, too, *A Seashore Drama.* It is often said that "A fact is a fact"—and I scarcely know a more futile sophism, unless it be the one which consists in saying that "Of tastes and colours there is no disputing." Such is not Balzac's opinion, at any rate. He believes that a fact is more than a fact, that it is the expression or manifestation of something other or more than

itself; or again, that it is a piece of evidence, a *document*, which it is not enough to have put on record, but in which we must also seek, through contrasts and resemblances, its deep ulterior meaning. And this is what he has tried to show in his *nouvelles*.

Thus we see what place they hold in his *The Human Comedy*. Balzac's short stories are not, in his work, what one might be tempted to call somewhat disdainfully "the chips of his workshop." Nor are they even, in relation to his long novels, what a painter's sketches, rough drafts, and studies are to his finished pictures. He did not write them by way of practice or experiment; they have their own value, intrinsic and well-defined. It would be a mistake, also, to consider them as little novels, in briefer form, which more time or leisure might have allowed their author to treat with more fullness. He conceived them for their own sake; he would never have consented to give them proportions which did not befit them. The truth of

the matter is that by reason of their dealing with the exceptional or extraordinary, they are, in a way, the element of *romantic drama* in Balzac's *Comedy;* and by reason of their philosophic or symbolic significance, they add the element of mystery to a work which but for them would be somewhat harshly illumined by the hard light of reality. Once more, that is why he did not classify his *The Conscript* with the *Scenes of Political Life,* or his *A Seashore Drama* with the *Scenes of Country Life.* That, too, is what gives them their interest and their originality. That is what distinguishes them from the stories of Prosper Mérimée, or, later, those of Guy de Maupassant. So much being made clear, it is not important now to ask whether they really have as much depth of meaning as their author claimed for them. That is another question; and I have just indicated why I cannot treat it in this brief Introduction. Only in a complete study of Balzac could his *nouvelles* be adequately judged. Then their due

place would be assigned to them, in the full scheme of *The Human Comedy*. I shall be happy if the English reader remembers this; and if the reading of these *nouvelles*, after having for a moment charmed him, shall also inspire him with the wish to know more closely and completely the greatest of French novelists.

F. Brunetière

The Unknown Masterpiece

TO A LORD:

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* * * * * *

* * * * * *

1845.

The Unknown Masterpiece

I

GILLETTE

LATE in the year 1612, one cold morning in December, a young man whose garments seemed very thin was walking before the door of a house on Rue des Grands-Augustins, Paris. After pacing that street for a long time, with the indecision of a lover who dares not pay a visit to his first mistress, however kind she may be, he at last crossed the threshold of the door and asked if Master François Porbus was at home. Upon receiving an affirmative reply from a woman who was sweeping a room on the lower floor, the young man went slowly up-stairs, hesitating from stair to stair, like a courtier of recent creation, apprehensive of the greeting which he was to

receive from the king. When he reached the top of the winding staircase, he stood for a moment on the landing, uncertain whether he should lift the grotesque knocker affixed to the door of the studio where the painter of Henri IV., cast aside for Rubens by Marie de Medici, was doubtless at work. The young man felt that profound emotion which must cause the hearts of all great artists to beat quickly, when, in the prime of youth and of their love for art, they approach a man of genius, or some noble masterpiece.

There exists in all human sentiments a primitive flower, engendered by a noble enthusiasm which grows constantly weaker and weaker, until happiness ceases to be more than a memory and glory more than a lie. Among these transitory sentiments, nothing bears so close a resemblance to love as the youthful passion of an artist just beginning to experience the delicious torture of his destiny of renown and of misfortune, a passion full of audacity and shyness, of vague beliefs and of

certain discouragement. The youthful genius, with empty pockets, whose heart has not throbbed upon appearing before a master, will always lack one chord in his heart, some indefinable touch of the brush, some feeling in his work, some shade of poetical expression. If some boasters, puffed out with conceit, believe too early in the future, they are considered people of intellect by fools alone. In this regard, the young stranger seemed to possess real merit, if talent is to be measured by that early timidity, that indescribable modesty which people destined to glory gradually lose in the exercise of their art, as pretty women lose theirs in the manœuvring of coquetry. The habitude of triumph lessens doubt, and modesty perhaps is a form of doubt.

Overwhelmed by surprise and distress at that moment of his overweening presumption, the poor neophyte would not have entered the studio of the painter to whom we owe the admirable portrait of Henri IV., except for an

extraordinary reinforcement sent him by chance. An old man ascended the stairs. From the oddity of his costume, the magnificence of his lace ruff, the ponderous self-assurance of his gait, the young man divined that he was either the painter's patron or his friend; he drew back against the wall to make room for him, and gazed at him curiously, hoping to find in him the kindly nature of an artist, or the obliging disposition of those who love art; but he detected something diabolical in that face, and above all that indefinable expression which artists dote upon. Imagine a bald, prominent, even protuberant forehead, overshadowing a small, flattened nose, turned up at the end like Rabelais's or Socrates's; a smiling mouth, wrinkled at the corners; a short chin, proudly raised, and adorned with a gray beard trimmed to a point; sea-green eyes, apparently dulled by age, which, however, by virtue of the contrast of the pearly-white in which the pupils swam, sometimes emitted magnetic glances under

the spur of wrath or enthusiasm. The face was woefully ravaged by the fatigues of age, and even more by the thoughts which tire mind and body alike. The eyes had no lashes, and one could barely detect a trace of eyebrows over their protruding arches. Place that head upon a slender and fragile body, surround it with a lace ruff of snowy whiteness and of a pattern as elaborate as that of a silver fish-knife, throw a heavy gold chain over the old man's black doublet, and you will have an imperfect image of that individual, to whom the dim light of the hall imparted an even stranger colouring. You would have said that it was one of Rembrandt's canvases, walking silently, without a frame, through the dark atmosphere which that great painter made his own. The old man cast a sagacious glance at the young one, tapped thrice on the door, and said to a sickly-looking personage of about forty years, who opened it:

"Good morning, master."

Porbus bowed respectfully; he admitted the

young man, thinking that he had come with the other, and paid the less heed to him because the neophyte was evidently under the spell which a born painter inevitably experiences at the aspect of the first studio that he sees, where some of the material processes of art are revealed to him. A window in the ceiling lighted Master Porbus's studio. The light, concentrated upon a canvas standing on the easel, which as yet bore only a few light strokes, did not reach the dark recesses in the corners of that enormous room; but a few stray gleams lighted up the silver bull's-eye in the centre of a cavalryman's cuirass hanging on the wall in the ruddy shadow; illuminated with a sudden beam the carved and polished cornice of an old-fashioned sideboard, laden with curious vessels; or studded with dazzling points of light the rough woof of certain old curtains of gold brocade, with broad, irregular folds, scattered about as drapery. Plaster casts, busts, and fragments of antique goddesses, fondly polished by the kisses of cent-

uries, lay about upon tables and consoles. Innumerable sketches, studies in coloured chalk, in red lead, or in pen and ink, covered the walls to the ceiling. Boxes of colours, bottles of oil and of essences, and overturned stools, left only a narrow path to the sort of halo projected by the high stained-glass window, through which the light fell full upon Porbus's pale face and upon the ivory skull of his strange visitor. The young man's attention was soon exclusively absorbed by a picture which had already become famous even in that epoch of commotion and revolution, and which was visited by some of those obstinate enthusiasts to whom we owe the preservation of the sacred fire during evil days. That beautiful canvas represented *St. Mary the Egyptian* preparing to pay for her passage in the boat. That masterpiece, painted for Marie de Medici, was sold by her in the days of her destitution.

"I like your saint," the old man said to Porbus, "and I would give you ten golden

crowns above the price that the queen is to pay; but meddle in her preserves! the deuce!"

"You think it is well done, do you?"

"Hum!" said the old man, "well done? Yes and no. Your saint is not badly put together, but she is not alive. You fellows think that you have done everything when you have drawn a figure correctly and put everything in its place according to the laws of anatomy. You colour this feature with a flesh-tint prepared beforehand on your palette, taking care to keep one side darker than the other; and because you glance from time to time at a nude woman standing on a table, you think that you have copied nature, you imagine that you are painters, and that you have discovered God's secret! Bah! To be a great poet, it is not enough to know syntax, and to avoid errors in grammar.

"Look at your saint, Porbus. At first glance she seems admirable; but at the second, one sees that she is glued to the canvas,

and that it is impossible to walk about her body. She is a silhouette with but a single face, a figure cut out of canvas, an image that can neither turn nor change its position. I am not conscious of the air between that arm and the background of the picture; space and depth are lacking. However, everything is right so far as perspective is concerned, and the gradation of light and shade is scrupulously observed; but, despite such praiseworthy efforts, I am unable to believe that that beautiful body is animated with the warm breath of life. It seems to me that, if I should put my hand upon that firm, round breast, I should find it as cold as marble. No, my friend, the blood does not flow beneath that ivory skin; life does not swell with its purple dew the veins and fibres which intertwine like network beneath the transparent, amber-hued temples and breast. This place throbs with life, but that other place is motionless; life and death contend in every detail; here it is a woman, there a statue, and there a corpse.

Your creation is incomplete. You have been able to breathe only a portion of your soul into your cherished work. The torch of Prometheus has gone out more than once in your hands, and many parts of your picture have not been touched by the celestial flame."

"But why, my dear master?" Porbus respectfully asked the old man, while the young man had difficulty in repressing a savage desire to strike him.

"Ah! it is this way," replied the little old man. "You have wavered irresolutely between the two systems, between drawing and colour, between the phlegmatic minuteness, the stiff precision of the old German masters, and the dazzling ardour and happy plenitude of the Italian painters. You have tried to imitate at the same time Hans Holbein and Titian, Albert Dürer and Paul Veronese. Assuredly that was a noble ambition! But what has happened? You have achieved neither the severe charm of precision, nor the deceitful

magic of the chiaroscuro. In this spot, like melted bronze which bursts its too fragile mould, the rich, light colouring of Titian brings out too prominently the meagre outlines of Albert Dürer in which you moulded it. Elsewhere, the features have resisted and held in check the superb polish of the Venetian palette. Your face is neither perfectly drawn nor perfectly painted, and bears everywhere the traces of that unfortunate indecision. If you did not feel strong enough to melt together in the flame of your genius the two rival systems, you should have chosen frankly one or the other, in order to obtain the unity which represents one of the conditions of life. You are accurate only in the surroundings, your outlines are false, do not envelop each other, and give no promise of anything behind.

"There is a touch of truth here," said the old man, pointing to the saint's breast; "and here," he added, indicating the point where the shoulder came to an end. "But here," he

said, reverting to the middle of the throat, "all is false. Let us not attempt to analyse anything; it would drive you to despair."

The old man seated himself on a stool, put his face in his hands, and said no more.

"Master," said Porbus, "I studied that throat very carefully in the nude figure; but, unfortunately for us, there are true effects in nature which seem improbable upon canvas."

"The mission of art is not to copy nature, but to express it! You are not a vile copyist, but a poet!" cried the old man, hastily interrupting Porbus with an imperious gesture. "Otherwise a sculptor would reach the end of his labours by moulding a woman! But try to mould your mistress's hand and to place it before you; you will find a horrible dead thing without any resemblance, and you will be obliged to resort to the chisel of the man who, without copying it exactly, will impart motion and life to it. We have to grasp the spirit, the soul, the physiognomy of things and of

creatures. Effects! effects! why, they are the accidents of life and not life itself.

"A hand — as I have taken that example — a hand does not simply belong to the body; it expresses and carries out a thought, which you must grasp and represent. Neither the painter, nor the poet, nor the sculptor should separate the effect from the cause, for they are inseparably connected! The real struggle is there! Many painters triumph by instinct, without realising this axiom of art. You draw a woman, but you do not see her! That is not the way that one succeeds in forcing the secrets of nature. Your hand reproduces, without your knowledge, the model that you have copied at your master's studio. You do not go down sufficiently into the inmost details of form, you do not pursue it with enough enthusiasm and perseverance in its windings and its flights.

"Beauty is a stern and exacting thing which does not allow itself to be caught so easily; we must await its pleasure, watch for it, seize

it, and embrace it closely, in order to compel it to surrender. Form is a Proteus much more difficult to seize and more fertile in evasions than the Proteus of fable; only after long struggles can one compel it to show itself in its real guise. You are content with the first aspect under which it appears to you, or at most with the second or third; that is not true of the victorious fighters! The invincible painters do not allow themselves to be deceived by all these subterfuges; they persevere until nature is reduced to the point where she must stand forth naked and in her real shape.

"That was the process adopted by Raphael," said the old man, removing his black velvet cap to express the respect inspired by the king of art; "his great superiority comes from the secret perception which, in him, seems determined to shatter form. In his figures form is what it really is in us, an interpreter for the communication of ideas and sensations, a vast poetic conception. Every figure is a world, a portrait, whose model has

appeared in a sublime vision, tinged with light, indicated by an inward voice, disrobed by a divine figure, which points out the sources of expression in the past of a whole life. You give your women lovely robes of flesh, lovely draperies of hair; but where is the blood which engenders tranquillity or passion, and which causes special effects? Your saint is a dark woman, but this one, my poor Porbus, is a blonde! Your figures are pale, coloured spectres which you parade before our eyes, and you call that painting and art!

"Because you have made something which looks more like a woman than like a house, you think that you have attained your end; and, overjoyed because you no longer have to write beside your figures, *currus venustus*, or *pulcher homo*, like the first painters, you fancy that you are marvellous artists! Ah, no! you are not that yet, my good fellows; you will have to use up more pencils and cover many canvases before you reach that point! To be sure, a woman carries her head

like that, she wears her skirts as this one does, her eyes languish and melt with that air of mild resignation, the quivering shadow of the eyelashes trembles thus upon her cheek! That is accurate and it is not accurate. What does it lack? A mere nothing, but that nothing is everything. You produce the appearance of life, but you do not express its overflow, that indefinable something which perhaps is the soul, and which floats cloudlike upon the outer envelope; in a word, that flower of life which Titian and Raphael discovered.

"Starting from the farthest point that you have reached, an excellent painting might perhaps be executed; but you grow weary too soon. The common herd admires, but the connoisseur smiles. O Mabuse, O my master," added this extraordinary individual, "you are a thief; you carried life away with you!—However," he continued, "this canvas is worth more than the painting of that mountebank of a Rubens, with his mountains of

Flemish flesh powdered with vermillion, his waves of red hair, and his wilderness of colours. At all events, you have here colouring, drawing, and sentiment, the three essential parts of art."

"But that saint is sublime, my good man!" cried the young man, in a loud voice, emerging from a profound reverie. "Those two figures, of the saint and the boatman, have a delicacy of expression utterly unknown to the Italian painters; I don't know a single one of them who could have achieved the hesitation of the boatman."

"Does this little knave belong to you?" Porbus asked the old man.

"Alas! pray excuse my presumption, master," replied the neophyte, blushing. "I am a stranger, a dauber by instinct, only lately arrived in this city, the source of all knowledge."

"To work!" said Porbus, handing him a pencil and a sheet of paper.

In a twinkling the stranger copied the *Mary*.

"O-ho!" cried the old man. "Your name?"

The young man wrote at the foot of the drawing: *Nicolas Poussin.*

"That is not bad for a beginner," said the strange creature who harangued so wildly. "I see that we can safely talk painting before you. I don't blame you for admiring Porbus's saint. It is a masterpiece for the world, and only those who are initiated in the most profound secrets of art can discover wherein it offends. But since you are worthy of the lesson and capable of understanding, I will show you how little is necessary to complete the work. Be all eyes and all attention; such an opportunity for instruction will never occur again perhaps.— Your palette, Porbus!"

Porbus went to fetch palette and brushes. The little old man turned up his sleeves with a convulsive movement, passed his thumb over the palette laden with colours, which Porbus handed to him, and snatched rather than took from his hands a handful of brushes

of all sizes; his pointed beard twitched with the mighty efforts that denoted the concupiscence of an amorous imagination. As he dipped his brush in the paint, he grumbled between his teeth:

"These colours are good for nothing but to throw out of the window, with the man who made them! They are disgustingly crude and false! How can one paint with such things?"

Then, with feverish vivacity, he dipped the point of the brush in different mounds of colour, sometimes running through the entire scale more rapidly than a cathedral organist runs over his keyboard in playing the *O Filii* at Easter.

Porbus and Poussin stood like statues, each on one side of the canvas, absorbed in the most intense contemplation.

"You see, young man," said the old man, without turning—"you see how, by means of three or four touches and a little blue varnish, one can make the air circulate around the head of the poor saint, who surely must

be stifling and feel imprisoned in that dense atmosphere! See how that drapery flutters about now, and how readily one can realise that the wind is raising it! Formerly it looked like starched linen held in place by pins. Do you see how perfectly the satinlike gloss with which I have touched the breast represents the supple plumpness of a maiden's flesh, and how the mixture of reddish brown and ochre warms the gray coldness of that tall ghost, in which the blood congealed instead of flowing? Young man, young man, what I am showing you now, no master could teach you! Mabuse alone possessed the secret of imparting life to figures. Mabuse had but one pupil, and that was I. I have had none, and I am growing old! You have intelligence enough to guess the rest from this glimpse that I give you."

While he spoke, the strange old man touched all the parts of the picture: here two strokes of the brush and there only one; but always so opportunely that one would have said that

it was a new painting, but a painting drenched with light. He worked with such impassioned zeal that the perspiration stood upon his high forehead; he moved so swiftly, with such impatient, jerky little movements, that to young Poussin it seemed as if there must be in that strange man's body a demon acting through his hands and guiding them erratically, against his will. The superhuman gleam of his eyes, the convulsions which seemed to be the effect of resistance, gave to that idea a semblance of truth, which was certain to act upon a youthful imagination. The old man worked on, saying:

"Paff! paff! paff! this is how we do it, young man! Come, my little touches, warm up this frigid tone for me! Come, come! pon! pon! pon!" he said, touching up the points where he had indicated a lack of life, effacing by a few daubs of paint the differences of temperament, and restoring the unity of tone which a warm-blooded Egyptian demanded. "You see, my boy, it is only the

last stroke of the brush that counts. Porbus has given a hundred, but I give only one. Nobody gives us credit for what is underneath. Be sure to remember that!"

At last the demon paused, and, turning to Porbus and Poussin, who were dumb with admiration, he said to them:

"This does n't come up to my *Belle Noiseuse;* however, a man could afford to put his name at the foot of such a work. Yes, I would sign it," he added, rising and taking a mirror in which he looked at it. "Now let us go to breakfast," he said. "Come to my house, both of you. I have some smoked ham and some good wine! Despite the evil times, we will talk painting. We are experts. This little man," he added, tapping Nicolas Poussin on the shoulder, "has a facile touch."

Noticing the Norman's shabby jacket at that moment, he took from his belt a goatskin purse, opened it, took out two goldpieces and said, offering them to him:

"I will buy your sketch."

"Take it," said Porbus to Poussin, seeing him start and blush with shame, for the young neophyte had all the pride of the poor man. "Take it, he has the ransom of two kings in his wallet."

All three went down from the studio, and, discoursing on art as they walked, bent their steps to a handsome wooden house near Pont St.-Michel, the decorations of which, the knocker, the window-frames, and the arabesques, aroused Poussin's wondering admiration. The painter in embryo suddenly found himself in a room on the lower floor, before a bright fire, beside a table laden with appetising dishes, and, by incredible good fortune, in the company of two great artists overflowing with good nature.

"Young man," said Porbus, seeing that he stood in open-mouthed admiration before a picture, "don't look at that canvas too closely, or you will be driven to despair."

It was the *Adam* which Mabuse painted in

order to obtain his release from the prison in which his creditors kept him so long. In truth, that face was of such startling reality that Nicolas Poussin began at that moment to understand the true meaning of the old man's confused remarks. The latter glanced at the picture with a satisfied expression, but without enthusiasm, and seemed to say: "I have done better than that!"

"There is life in it," he said; "my poor master surpassed himself; but it still lacks a little truth in the background. The man is thoroughly alive; he is about to rise and walk towards us. But the air, the sky, the wind, which we breathe and see and feel, are not there. And then there is only a man! Now the only man that ever came forth from the hands of God ought to have something of the divine, which he lacks. Mabuse himself said so with irritation, when he was not drunk."

Poussin glanced at the old man and Porbus in turn, with restless curiosity. He approached the latter as if to ask him the name of their

host; but the painter put his finger to his lips with a mysterious air, and the young man, intensely interested, kept silence, hoping that sooner or later some chance remark would enable him to discover the name of his host, whose wealth and talent were sufficiently attested by the respect which Porbus manifested for him and by the marvellous things collected in that room.

Seeing a superb portrait of a woman upon the oaken wainscoting, Poussin exclaimed:

"What a beautiful Giorgione!"

"No," replied the old man; "you are looking at one of my first daubs."

"*Tu-dieu!* then I must be in the house of the god of painting!" said Poussin, ingenuously.

The old man smiled like one long familiar with such praise.

"Master Frenhofer!" said Porbus, "could n't you send for a little of your fine Rhine wine for me?"

"Two casks!" replied the old man; "one

to pay for the pleasure which I enjoyed this morning in seeing your pretty sinner, and the other as a friendly gift."

"Ah! if I were not always ill," rejoined Porbus, "and if you would let me see your *Belle Noiseuse,* I might be able to paint a picture, high and wide and deep, in which the figures would be life-size."

"Show my work!" cried the old man, intensely excited. "No, no! I still have to perfect it. Yesterday, towards night," he said, "I thought that it was finished. The eyes seemed to me moist, the flesh quivered; the tresses of the hair moved. It breathed! Although I have discovered the means of producing upon flat canvas the relief and roundness of nature, I realised my error this morning, by daylight. Ah! to attain that glorious result, I have thoroughly studied the great masters of colouring, I have analysed and raised, layer by layer, the pictures of Titian, that king of light; like that sovereign painter, I have sketched my figure in a light shade,

with soft, thick colour — for shading is simply an accident, remember that, my boy! — Then I returned to my work, and by means of half-tints, and of varnish, the transparency of which I lessened more and more, I made the shadows more and more pronounced, even to the deepest blacks; for the shadows of ordinary painters are of a different nature from their light tones; they are wood, brass, whatever you choose, except flesh in shadow. One feels that, if a figure should change its posture, the shaded places would not brighten, and would never become light. I have avoided that fault, into which many of the most illustrious artists have fallen, and in my work the whiteness of the flesh stands out under the darkness of the deepest shadow.

"I have not, like a multitude of ignorant fools, who fancy that they draw correctly because they make a carefully shaded stroke, marked distinctly the outer lines of my figure and given prominence to the most trivial anatomical details, for the human body does not

end in lines. In that regard, sculptors can approach the truth more nearly than we can. Nature demands a succession of rounded outlines which shade into one another. Strictly speaking, drawing does not exist!—Do not laugh, young man! However strange that remark may seem to you, you will understand its meaning some day.—The line is the means by which man interprets the effect of light upon objects; but there are no lines in nature, where everything is full; it is in modelling that one draws, that is to say, that one removes things from the surroundings in which they are; the distribution of light alone gives reality to the body! So that I have not sharply outlined the features; I have spread over the outlines a cloud of light, warm half-tints, the result being that one cannot place one's finger upon the exact spot where the outline ends and the background begins. Seen at close quarters, the work seems cottony and to lack precision; but two yards away, everything becomes distinct and stands out; the body

moves, the forms become prominent, and one can feel the air circulating all about.. However, I am not satisfied yet; I still have doubts.

"Perhaps I should not have drawn a single line; perhaps it would be better to attack a figure in the middle, devoting one's self first to the prominences which are most in the light, and passing then to the darker portions. Is not that the way in which the sun, that divine painter of the universe, proceeds? O Nature, Nature! who has ever surprised thee in thy flights? I tell you that too much knowledge, like ignorance, ends in a negation. I doubt my work!"

The old man paused, then continued:

"For ten years, young man, I have been working, but what are ten short years when it is a question of contending with nature? We have no idea how long a time Pygmalion employed in making the only statue that ever walked!"

The old man fell into a profound reverie,

and sat with staring eyes, mechanically toying with his knife.

"He is conversing with his *spirit* now!" said Porbus in an undertone.

At that word Nicolas Poussin became conscious of the presence of an indefinable artistic curiosity. That old man with the white eyes, staring and torpid, became in his eyes more than a man; he assumed the aspect of an unreal genius living in an unknown sphere. He stirred a thousand confused ideas in his mind. The mental phenomenon of that species of fascination can no more be defined than one can define the emotion aroused by a ballad which recalls the fatherland to the exile's heart. The contempt which that old man affected to express for the most beautiful works of art, his wealth, his manners, the deference with which Porbus treated him, that work kept secret so long — a work of patience and of genius doubtless, judging by the head of a *Virgin* which young Poussin had so enthusiastically admired, and which, still beautiful,

even beside Mabuse's *Adam*, bore witness to the imperial workmanship of one of the princes of art — everything, in short, about the old man went beyond the bounds of human nature.

The one point which was perfectly clear and manifest to Nicolas Poussin's fertile imagination was a complete image of the artistic nature, of that irresponsible nature to which so many powers are entrusted, and which too often misuses them, leading cold reason, the honest bourgeois, and even some experts, through innumerable rock-strewn paths, where there is nothing so far as they are concerned; whereas that white-winged damsel, unreasoning in her fancies, discovers these epic poems, châteaux, and works of art. A sardonic but kindly nature; fertile but sterile. Thus, to the enthusiastic Poussin, that old man had become, by an abrupt transfiguration, art itself, art with its secrets, its unruly impulses, and its reveries.

"Yes, my dear Porbus," Frenhofer resumed,

"I have failed thus far to meet an absolutely flawless woman, a body the outlines of which are perfectly beautiful, and whose colouring— But where is she to be found in real life?" he asked, interrupting himself, "that undiscoverable Venus of the ancients, so often sought, of whom we find only a few scattered charms? Oh! to see for an instant, but a single time, that divine, complete, in a word, ideal nature, I would give my whole fortune. Aye, I would seek thee in the abode of the dead, O divine beauty! Like Orpheus, I would go down into the hell of art to bring life back thence."

"We may go away," said Porbus to Poussin; "he neither hears nor sees us now."

"Let us go to his studio," suggested the wonder-struck youth.

"Oh! the old fellow knows how to keep people out. His treasures are too well guarded for us to obtain a glimpse of them. I have not awaited your suggestion and your longing before attacking the mystery."

"So there is a mystery?"

"Yes," Porbus replied. "Old Frenhofer is the only pupil whom Mabuse would ever consent to take. Having become his friend, his saviour, his father, Frenhofer sacrificed the greater part of his property to humour Mabuse's passions; in exchange Mabuse bequeathed to him the secret of *relief*, the power of imparting to figures that extraordinary appearance of life, that touch of nature, which is our never-ending despair, but of which he was such a thorough master that one day, having sold and drunk the flowered damask which he was to wear on the occasion of Charles V.'s entry into Paris, he attended his master in a garment of paper painted to represent damask. The peculiar brilliancy of the fabric worn by Mabuse surprised the Emperor, who, when he attempted to compliment the old drunkard's patron, discovered the fraud.

"Frenhofer is passionately devoted to our art, and he looks higher and farther ahead than other painters. He has given much profound thought to the subject of colouring and

to the absolute accuracy of lines; but he has studied so much that he has reached the point where he is uncertain of the very object of his studies. In his moments of despair he declares that drawing does not exist and that only geometrical figures can be made with lines; which is going beyond the truth, for with lines and with black, which is not a colour, a human figure may be drawn; which proves that our art, like nature, is made up of an infinite number of elements: drawing furnishes a skeleton, colour gives life; but life without the skeleton is much less complete than the skeleton without life. In short, there is one thing which is more true than any of these, and that is that practice and observation are everything with a painter, and that, if reason and poetic sense quarrel with the brush, we arrive at doubt, like our excellent friend here, who is as much madman as painter. A sublime artist, he was unfortunate enough to be born rich, which permitted him to go astray; do not imitate him! Work!

Painters ought not to meditate, except with brush in hand."

"We will find our way there!" cried Poussin, no longer listening to Porbus, and undeterred by doubts.

Porbus smiled at the young stranger's enthusiasm, and, when they parted, invited him to come to see him.

Nicolas Poussin walked slowly back to Rue de la Harpe, and passed, unperceiving, the modest house in which he lodged. Ascending his wretched staircase with anxious haste, he reached a room high up beneath a roof supported by pillars, a simple and airy style of architecture found in the houses of old Paris. Beside the single, dark window of that room sat a girl, who, when she heard the door, sprang at once to her feet with a loving impulse; she recognised the painter by the way he raised the latch.

"What 's the matter?" she asked.

"The matter—the matter—" he cried, choking with joy; "the matter is that I have

come to feel that I am a painter. I have always doubted myself before, but this morning I believe in myself! I tell you, Gillette, we shall be rich, happy! There is gold in these brushes."

But suddenly he ceased to speak. His strong and serious face lost its joyous expression when he compared the vastness of his hopes with the paucity of his resources. The walls were covered with pieces of common paper on which were sketches in pencil. He owned no clean canvases. Paints commanded a high price in those days, and the poor young man's palette was almost bare. In the depths of his poverty he possessed and was conscious of an incredible store of courage and a superabundance of all-consuming genius. Brought to Paris by a gentleman who was a friend of his, or perhaps by his own talent, he had almost immediately fallen in with a mistress, one of those noble and devoted souls who suffer beside a great man, espouse his troubles, and try to understand

his caprices; strong in poverty and love, as other women are fearless in bearing the burden of luxury and in parading their lack of feeling. The smile that played about Gillette's lips diffused a golden light through that garret, and overspread the sky with brightness. The sun did not always shine, whereas she was always there, sedate in her passion, clinging to her happiness and her suffering, encouraging the genius which overflowed in love before seizing upon art.

"Listen, Gillette—come here."

The light-hearted, obedient girl jumped upon the painter's knees. She was all grace, all beauty, lovely as a spring day, adorned by all womanly charms, and illumining them with the glow of a lovely soul.

"O God!" he cried, "I shall never dare to tell her."

"A secret?" said she; "I insist upon knowing it."

Poussin seemed lost in thought.

"Speak, I say."

"Gillette—poor, beloved darling!"

"Ah! you want something of me, do you?"

"Yes."

"If you want me to pose for you as I did the other day," she said, with a little pout, "I shall never consent; for at those times your eyes have nothing at all to say to me. You forget all about me, and yet you look at me."

"Would you prefer to see me painting another woman?"

"Perhaps so," she said, "if she was very ugly."

"Well," rejoined Poussin, in a serious tone, "suppose that, for any future glory, to make me a great painter, it were necessary for you to pose for another artist?"

"You can test me all you choose," she replied. "You know that I would not go."

Poussin let his head fall on his breast, like one who surrenders to a joy or a sorrow that is too great for his heart.

"Listen," said she, plucking at the sleeve of Poussin's threadbare doublet, "I have told you, Nick, that I would give my life for you; but I never promised to give up my love while I am alive."

"Give it up?" cried the young artist.

"If I should show myself like that to another man, you would cease to love me, and I should deem myself unworthy of you. Is it not a most simple and natural thing to obey your whims? In spite of myself, I am happy, aye, proud, to do your dear will. But for another man — ah, no!"

"Forgive me, my Gillette," cried the painter, throwing himself at her feet. "I prefer to be beloved rather than famous. In my eyes you are fairer than wealth and honours. Go, throw away my brushes, burn these sketches. I have made a mistake. My vocation is to love you. I am no painter, I am a lover. Away with art and all its secrets!"

She gazed admiringly at him, happy, overjoyed. She was queen; she felt instinctively

that art was forgotten for her, and cast at her feet like a grain of incense.

"And yet it is only an old man," continued Poussin. "He could see only the woman in you — you are so perfect!"

"One must needs love," she cried, ready to sacrifice the scruples of her love to repay her lover for all the sacrifices that he made for her. "But," she added, "it would be my ruin. Ah! ruin for you — yes, that would be very lovely! But you will forget me! Oh! what a wicked idea this is of yours!"

"I conceived the idea, and I love you," he said with a sort of contrition; "but am I for that reason a villain?"

"Let us consult Father Hardouin," she said.

"Oh, no! let it be a secret between us."

"Very good, I will go. But do not be there," she cried. "Stay at the door, with your dagger drawn; if I cry out, come in and kill the painter."

With no eyes for aught but his art, Poussin threw his arms about Gillette.

"He no longer loves me!" thought Gillette, when she was alone.

Already she repented her decision. But she was soon seized by a terror more painful than her regret; she strove to drive away a shocking thought that stole into her mind. She fancied that she already loved the painter less, because she suspected that he was less estimable than she had hitherto believed.

II

CATHERINE LESCAULT

THREE months after the meeting of Poussin and Porbus, the latter went to see Master Frenhofer. The old man was then in the depths of one of those periods of profound and sudden discouragement, the cause of which, if we are to believe the mathematicians of medicine, consists in bad digestion, the wind, the heat, or some disturbance in the hypochondriac region; and, according to the spiritualists, in the imperfection of our moral nature. The good man had simply tired himself out

in finishing his mysterious picture. He was languidly reclining in an enormous chair of carved oak, upholstered in black leather; and without changing his depressed attitude, he darted at Porbus the glance of a man who had determined to make the best of his ennui.

"Well, master," said Porbus, "was the ultramarine, that you went to Bruges for, very bad? Have n't you been able to grind our new white? Is your oil poor, or are your brushes unmanageable?"

"Alas!" cried the old man, "I thought for a moment that my work was finished; but I certainly have gone astray in some details, and my mind will not be at rest until I have solved my doubts. I have almost decided to travel, to go to Turkey, to Greece, and to Asia, in search of a model, and to compare my picture with nature in different climes. It may be that I have up-stairs," he continued with a smile of satisfaction, "Nature herself. Sometimes I am almost afraid that a breath

will awaken that woman and that she will disappear."

Then he rose abruptly, as if to go.

"Ah!" replied Porbus; "I have come just in time to save you the expense and the fatigue of the journey."

"How so?" asked Frenhofer in amazement.

"Young Poussin is loved by a woman whose incomparable beauty is absolutely without a flaw. But, my dear master, if he consents to lend her to you, you must at least let us see your picture."

The old man stood, perfectly motionless, in a state of utter stupefaction.

"What!" he cried at last, in a heartrending voice, "show my creation, my spouse? Tear away the veil with which I have modestly covered my happiness? Why, that would be the most shocking prostitution! For ten years I have lived with that woman; she is mine, mine alone, she loves me. Does she not smile at every stroke of the brush

which I give her? She has a soul, the soul with which I have endowed her. She would blush if other eyes than mine should rest upon her. Show her! Where is the husband, the lover, base enough to lend his wife to dishonour? When you paint a picture for the court, you do not put your whole soul into it, you sell to the courtiers nothing more than coloured mannikins. My painting is not a painting; it is a sentiment, a passion! Born in my studio, it must remain there unsullied, and can not come forth until it is clothed. Poesy and women never abandon themselves naked to any but their lovers! Do we possess Raphael's model, Ariosto's Angelica, or Dante's Beatrice? No! We see only their shapes. Very well; the work which I have up-stairs under lock and key is an exception in our art. It is not a canvas, it is a woman; a woman with whom I weep, and laugh, and talk, and think. Do you expect me suddenly to lay aside a joy that has lasted ten years, as one lays aside a cloak? Do you expect me sud-

denly to cease to be father, lover, and God? That woman is not a creature, she is a creation. Let your young man come — I will give him my wealth; I will give him pictures by Correggio, Michelangelo, or Titian; I will kiss his footprints in the dust; but make him my rival? Shame! Ah! I am even more lover than painter. Yes, I shall have the strength to burn my *Belle Noiseuse* when I breathe my last; but to force her to endure the glance of a man, of a young man, of a painter? No, no! I would kill to-morrow the man who should sully her with a look! I would kill you on the instant, my friend, if you did not salute her on your knees! Do you expect me now to subject my idol to the insensible glances and absurd criticisms of fools? Ah! love is a mystery, it lives only in the deepest recesses of the heart, and all is lost when a man says, even to his friend: 'This is she whom I love!'"

The old man seemed to have become young again; his eyes gleamed with life; his pale

cheeks flushed a bright red, and his hands shook. Porbus, surprised by the passionate force with which the words were spoken, did not know what reply to make to an emotion no less novel than profound. Was Frenhofer sane or mad? Was he under the spell of an artistic caprice, or did the ideas which he had expressed proceed from that strange fanaticism produced in us by the long gestation of a great work? Could one hope ever to come to an understanding with that extraordinary passion?

Engrossed by all these thoughts, Porbus said to the old man:

"But is it not woman for woman? Will not Poussin abandon his mistress to your eyes?"

"What mistress?" rejoined Frenhofer. "She will betray him sooner or later. Mine will always be faithful to me!"

"Very well!" said Porbus, "let us say no more about it. But, perhaps, before you find, even in Asia, a woman so lovely, so perfect

as is she of whom I speak, you will die without finishing your picture."

"Ah! it is finished," said Frenhofer. "Whoever should see it would think that he was looking at a woman lying upon a velvet couch, behind a curtain. Beside her is a golden tripod containing perfumes. You would be tempted to seize the tassel of the cords which hold the curtain, and you would fancy that you saw the bosom of Catherine Lescault, a beautiful courtesan called *La Belle Noiseuse,* rise and fall with the movement of her breath. However, I should like to be certain——"

"Oh! go to Asia," Porbus replied, as he detected a sort of hesitation in Frenhofer's expression.

And Porbus walked towards the door of the room.

At that moment Gillette and Nicolas Poussin arrived at Frenhofer's house. When the girl was about to enter, she stepped back, as if she were oppressed by some sudden presentiment.

"Why have I come here, pray?" she asked her lover in a deep voice, gazing at him steadfastly.

"Gillette, I left you entirely at liberty, and I mean to obey you in everything. You are my conscience and my renown. Go back to the house; I shall be happier perhaps than if you——"

"Do I belong to myself when you speak to me thus? Oh no! I am nothing more than a child. Come," she added, apparently making a mighty effort; "if our love dies, and if I plant in my heart a never-ending regret, will not your fame be the reward of my compliance with your wishes? Let us go in; it will be like living again to be always present as a memory on your palette."

As they opened the door of the house, the two lovers met Porbus, who, startled by the beauty of Gillette, whose eyes were then filled with tears, seized her, trembling from head to foot as she was, and said, leading her into the old man's presence:

"Look! is she not above all the masterpieces on earth?"

Frenhofer started. Gillette stood there in the ingenuous and unaffected attitude of a young Georgian girl, innocent and timid, abducted by brigands and offered for sale to a slave-merchant. A modest flush tinged her cheeks, she lowered her eyes, her hands were hanging at her side, her strength seemed to abandon her, and tears protested against the violence done to her modesty. At that moment Poussin, distressed beyond words because he had taken that lovely pearl from his garret, cursed himself. He became more lover than artist, and innumerable scruples tortured his heart when he saw the old man's kindling eye, as, in accordance with the habit of painters, he mentally disrobed the girl, so to speak, divining her most secret forms. Thereupon the young man reverted to the savage jealousy of true love.

"Let us go, Gillette," he cried.

At that tone, at that outcry, his mistress

looked up at him in rapture, saw his face and ran into his arms.

"Ah! you do love me then?" she replied, melting into tears.

Although she had mustered energy to impose silence upon her suffering, she lacked strength to conceal her joy.

"Oh! leave her with me for a moment," said the old painter, "and you may compare her to my *Catherine*. Yes, I consent."

There was love in Frenhofer's cry, too. He seemed to be acting the part of a coquette for his counterfeit woman, and to enjoy in advance the triumph which the beauty of his creation would certainly win over that of a girl of flesh and blood.

"Do not let him retract!" cried Porbus, bringing his hand down on Poussin's shoulder. "The fruits of love soon pass away, those of art are immortal."

"In his eyes," retorted Gillette, looking earnestly at Poussin and Porbus, "in his eyes am I nothing more than a woman?"

She tossed her head proudly; but when, after a flashing glance at Frenhofer, she saw her lover gazing at the portrait which he had formerly mistaken for a Giorgione, she said:

"Ah! let us go up! He never looked at me like that."

"Old man," said Poussin, roused from his meditation by Gillette's voice, "look at this sword: I will bury it in your heart at the first word of complaint that this girl utters; I will set fire to your house and no one shall leave it! Do you understand?"

Nicolas Poussin's face was dark, and his voice was terrible. The young painter's attitude, and above all his gesture, comforted Gillette, who almost forgave him for sacrificing her to painting and to his glorious future. Porbus and Poussin remained at the door of the studio, looking at each other in silence. Although, at first, the painter of *Mary the Egyptian* indulged in an exclamation or two: "Ah! she is undressing; he is telling her to stand in the light; now he is comparing her

with the other!" he soon held his peace at the aspect of Poussin, whose face was profoundly wretched; and although the old painters had none of those scruples which seem so trivial in the presence of art, he admired them, they were so attractive and so innocent. The young man had his hand on the hilt of his dagger and his ear almost glued to the door. The two men, standing thus in the darkness, resembled two conspirators awaiting the moment to strike down a tyrant.

"Come in, come in," cried the old man, radiant with joy. "My work is perfect, and now I can show it with pride. Never will painter, brushes, colours, canvas, and light produce a rival to Catherine Lescault, the beautiful courtesan!"

Impelled by the most intense curiosity, Porbus and Poussin hurried to the centre of an enormous studio covered with dust, where everything was in disorder, and where they saw pictures hanging on the walls here and there. They paused at first in front of a life-

size figure of a woman, half nude, which aroused their admiration.

"Oh, don't pay any attention to that," said Frenhofer; "that is a sketch that I dashed off to study a pose; it is worth nothing as a picture. There are some of my mistakes," he continued, pointing to a number of fascinating compositions hanging on the walls about them.

At those words, Porbus and Poussin, thunderstruck by his contempt for such works, looked about for the famous portrait, but could not discover it.

"Well, there it is!" said the old man, whose hair was dishevelled, whose face was inflamed by superhuman excitement, whose eyes sparkled, and who panted like a young man drunk with love. "Aha!" he cried, "you did not expect such absolute perfection! You are before a woman, and you are looking for a picture. There is so much depth on this canvas, the air is so real, that you cannot distinguish it from the air that surrounds us. Where is art? Lost, vanished! Behold the

actual form of a young girl. Have I not obtained to perfection the colour, the sharpness of the line which seems to bound the body? Is it not the same phenomenon presented by objects in the atmosphere, as well as by fishes in the water? Observe how the outlines stand out from the background! Does it not seem to you that you could pass your hand over that back? Why, for seven years I studied the effects of the conjunction of light and of objects. And that hair, does not the light fairly inundate it? Why, she actually breathed, I believe!—Look at that bosom! Ah! who would not adore her on his knees? The flesh quivers. She is going to rise—wait!"

"Can you see anything?" Poussin asked Porbus.

"No. And you?"

"Nothing."

The two painters left the old man to his dreams, and looked to see whether the light, falling straight upon the canvas to which he

was pointing, did not efface all the lines. They examined the picture from the right, from the left, and in front, alternately stooping and rising.

"Yes, yes, it 's really canvas," said Frenhofer, mistaking the purpose of that careful scrutiny. "See, here is the frame and the easel, and here are my colours and my brushes."

And he seized a brush and handed it to them with an artless gesture.

"The old villain is making sport of us," said Poussin, returning to his position in front of the alleged picture. "I can see nothing but a confused mass of colours, surrounded by a multitude of curious lines which form a wall of painting."

"We were mistaken; look!" replied Porbus.

On going nearer, they saw in the corner of the canvas the end of a bare foot emerging from that chaos of vague colours and shades, that sort of shapeless mist; but a most lovely,

a living foot! They stood speechless with admiration before that fragment, which had escaped a slow, relentless, incomprehensible destruction. That foot was like a bust of Venus in Parian marble, rising amid the ruins of a burned city.

"There is a woman underneath!" cried Porbus, calling Poussin's attention to the coats of paint which the old painter had laid on one after another, thinking that he was perfecting his work.

The two artists turned impulsively towards Frenhofer, beginning to understand, although but vaguely, the state of ecstasy in which he lived.

"He acts in perfect good faith," said Porbus.

"Yes, my friend," said the old man, rousing himself, "one must have faith, faith in art, and must live a long while with his work, to produce such a creation. Some of those shadows have cost me many hours of toil. See, on the cheek, just below the eye, there

is a faint penumbra, which, if you notice it in nature, will seem to you almost beyond reproduction. Well, do you think that that effect did not cost me unheard-of trouble? But look closely at my work, my dear Porbus, and you will understand better what I said to you as to the method of treating modelling and outlines. Look at the light on the breast, and see how, by a succession of strongly emphasised touches and retouches, I have succeeded in reproducing the real light, and in combining it with the polished whiteness of the light tones; and how by the opposite means, by effacing the lumps and the roughness of the colours, I have been able, by softly retouching the outline of my figure, drowned in the half-tint, to take away even a suggestion of drawing and of artificial means, and to give it the aspect and the roundness of nature itself. Go nearer, and you will see the work better. At a distance it is imperceptible. Look, just here it is very remarkable, I think."

And with the end of his brush he pointed out to the two painters a layer of light paint.

Porbus laid his hand on the old man's shoulder and said, turning to Poussin:

"Do you know that we have before us a very great painter?"

"He is even more poet than painter," replied Poussin, gravely.

"Here," rejoined Porbus, pointing to the canvas, "here ends our art on earth."

"And from here it soars upwards and disappears in the skies," said Poussin.

"How much pleasure is concentrated on this piece of canvas!" cried Porbus.

The old man, completely distraught, did not listen to them; he was smiling at that ideal woman.

"But sooner or later he will discover that there is nothing on his canvas!" exclaimed Poussin.

"Nothing on my canvas!" cried Frenhofer, gazing at the two painters and at his alleged picture in turn.

"What have you done?" whispered Porbus to Poussin.

The old man grasped the young man's arm violently, and said to him:

"You see nothing, you clown! you boor! you idiot! you villain! Then why did you come up here?—My dear Porbus," he continued, turning towards the painter; "is it possible that you too would mock at me? I am your friend; tell me, have I spoiled my picture?"

Porbus hesitated, not daring to say anything; but the anxiety depicted on the old man's pale face was so heartrending that he pointed to the canvas, saying:

"Look!"

Frenhofer gazed at his picture for a moment, and staggered.

"Nothing! nothing! and after working ten years!"

He sat down and wept.

"So I am an idiot, a madman! I have neither talent nor capacity! I am nothing

more than a rich man, who, when I walk, do nothing but walk! So I have produced nothing!"

He gazed at his canvas through his tears; suddenly he rose with a gesture of pride and cast a flashing glance at the two painters.

"By the blood, by the body, by the head of the Christ! you are jealous hounds who wish to make me believe that it is spoiled, in order to steal it from me! But I can see her!" he cried, "and she is wonderfully lovely!"

At that moment, Poussin heard Gillette crying in a corner where she was cowering, entirely forgotten.

"What is the matter, my angel?" asked the painter, suddenly become the lover once more.

"Kill me!" she said. "I should be a shameless creature to love you still, for I despise you. I admire you and I have a horror of you! I love you, and I believe that I hate you already."

While Poussin listened to Gillette. Fren-

hofer covered his *Catherine* with a green curtain, with the calm gravity of a jeweller closing his drawers when he thinks that he is in the company of clever thieves. He bestowed upon the two painters a profoundly cunning glance, full of contempt and suspicion, and silently ushered them out of his studio, with convulsive haste; then standing in his doorway, he said to them:

"Adieu, my little friends."

That "adieu" horrified the two painters. The next day Porbus, in his anxiety, went again to see Frenhofer, and learned that he had died in the night, after burning all his pictures.

1831.

A Seashore Drama

To

MADAME LA PRINCESSE CAROLINE GALITZIN DE GENTHOD, NÉE COMTESSE WALEWSKA:

The author's homage and remembrances.

A Seashore Drama

YOUNG men almost always have a pair of compasses with which they delight to measure the future; when their will is in accord with the size of the angle which they make, the world is theirs. But this phenomenon of moral life takes place only at a certain age. That age, which in the case of all men comes between the years of twenty-two and twenty-eight, is the age of noble thoughts, the age of first conceptions, because it is the age of unbounded desires, the age at which one doubts nothing; he who talks of doubt speaks of impotence. After that age, which passes as quickly as the season for sowing, comes the age of execution. There are in a certain sense two youths: one during which one thinks, the other during which one acts; often they are blended, in men whom nature has favoured, and who, like Cæsar, Newton, and

Bonaparte, are the greatest among great men.

I was reckoning how much time a thought needs to develop itself; and, compasses in hand, standing on a cliff a hundred fathoms above the ocean, whose waves played among the reefs, I laid out my future, furnishing it with works, as an engineer draws fortresses and palaces upon vacant land. The sea was lovely; I had just dressed after bathing; I was waiting for Pauline, my guardian angel, who was bathing in a granite bowl full of white sand, the daintiest bath-tub that Nature ever designed for any of her sea-fairies. We were at the extreme point of Le Croisic, a tiny peninsula of Brittany; we were far from the harbour, in a spot which the authorities considered so inaccessible that the customs-officers almost never visited it. To swim in the air after swimming in the sea! Ah! who would not have swum into the future? Why did I think? Why does evil happen? Who knows? Ideas come to your heart, or your brain, with-

out consulting you. No courtesan was ever more whimsical or more imperious than is conception in an artist; it must be caught, like fortune, by the hair, when it comes. Clinging to my thought, as Astolphe clung to his hippogriff, I galloped through the world, arranging everything therein to suit my pleasure.

When I looked about me in search of some omen favourable to the audacious schemes which my wild imagination advised me to undertake, a sweet cry, the cry of a woman calling in the silence of the desert, the cry of a woman coming from the bath, refreshed and joyous, drowned the murmur of the fringe of foam tossed constantly back and forth by the rising and falling of the waves in the indentations of the shore. When I heard that note, uttered by the soul, I fancied that I had seen on the cliff the foot of an angel, who, as she unfolded her wings, had called to me: "Thou shalt have success!" I descended, radiant with joy and light as air; I went bounding down, like a stone down a steep slope. When

she saw me, she said to me: "What is the matter?" I did not answer, but my eyes became moist. The day before, Pauline had understood my pain, as she understood at that moment my joy, with the magical sensitiveness of a harp which follows the variations of the atmosphere. The life of man has some glorious moments! We walked silently along the shore. The sky was cloudless, the sea without a ripple; others would have seen only two blue plains, one above the other; but we who understood each other without need of speech, we who could discover between those two swaddling-cloths of infinity the illusions with which youth is nourished, we pressed each other's hand at the slightest change which took place either in the sheet of water or in the expanse of air; for we took those trivial phenomena for material interpretations of our twofold thought.

Who has not enjoyed that unbounded bliss in pleasure, when the soul seems to be released from the bonds of the flesh, and to be restored

as it were to the world whence it came? Pleasure is not our only guide in those regions. Are there not times when the sentiments embrace each other as of their own motion, and fly thither, like two children who take each other's hands and begin to run without knowing why or whither? We walked along thus.

At the moment that the roofs of the town appeared on the horizon, forming a grayish line, we met a poor fisherman who was returning to Le Croisic. His feet were bare, his canvas trousers were ragged on the edges, with many holes imperfectly mended; he wore a shirt of sail-cloth, wretched list suspenders, and his jacket was a mere rag. The sight of that misery distressed us — a discord, as it were, in the midst of our harmony. We looked at each other, to lament that we had not at that moment the power to draw upon the treasury of Aboul-Cacem. We saw a magnificent lobster and a crab hanging by a cord which the fisherman carried in his right

hand, while in the other he had his nets and his fishing apparatus. We accosted him, with the purpose of buying his fish, an idea which occurred to both of us, and which expressed itself in a smile, to which I replied by slightly pressing the arm which I held and drawing it closer to my heart. It was one of those nothings which the memory afterward transforms into a poem, when, sitting by the fire, we recall the time when that nothing moved us, the place where it happened, and that mirage, the effects of which have never been defined, but which often exerts an influence upon the objects which surround us, when life is pleasant and our hearts are full.

The loveliest places are simply what we make them. Who is the man, however little of a poet he may be, who has not in his memory a bowlder that occupies more space than the most famous landscape visited at great expense? Beside that bowlder what tempestuous thoughts! there, a whole life mapped out; here, fears banished; there, rays of hope

entered the heart. At that moment, the sun, sympathising with these thoughts of love and of the future, cast upon the yellowish sides of that cliff an ardent beam; some mountain wild-flowers attracted the attention; the tranquillity and silence magnified that uneven surface, in reality dark of hue, but made brilliant by the dreamer; then it was beautiful, with its meagre vegetation, its warm-hued camomile, its Venus's hair, with the velvety leaves. A prolonged festivity, superb decorations, placid exaltation of human strength! Once before, the Lake of Bienne, seen from Île St.-Pierre, had spoken to me thus; perhaps the cliff of Le Croisic would be the last of those delights. But, in that case, what would become of Pauline?

"You have had fine luck this morning, my good man," I said to the fisherman.

"Yes, monsieur," he replied, stopping to turn towards us the tanned face of those who remain for hours at a time exposed to the reflection of the sun on the water.

That face indicated endless resignation; the patience of the fisherman, and his gentle manners. That man had a voice without trace of harshness, kindly lips, no ambition; an indefinably frail and sickly appearance. Any other type of face would have displeased us.

"Where are you going to sell your fish?"

"At the town."

"How much will you get for the lobster?"

"Fifteen sous."

"And for the crab?"

"Twenty sous."

"Why so much difference between the lobster and the crab?"

"The crab is much more delicate, monsieur; and then it 's as cunning as a monkey, and don't often allow itself to be caught."

"Will you let us have both for a hundred sous?" said Pauline.

The man was thunderstruck.

"You sha' n't have them!" I said laughingly; "I will give ten francs. We must pay for emotions all that they are worth."

"Very well," she replied, "I propose to have them; I will give ten francs two sous."

"Ten sous."

"Twelve francs."

"Fifteen francs."

"Fifteen francs fifty," she said.

"One hundred francs."

"One hundred and fifty."

I bowed. At that moment we were not rich enough to carry the bidding any farther. The poor fisherman did not know whether he ought to be angry as at a practical joke, or to exult; we relieved him from his dilemma by giving him the name of our landlady and telling him to take the lobster and the crab to her house.

"Do you earn a living?" I asked him, in order to ascertain to what cause his destitution should be attributed.

"With much difficulty and many hardships," he replied. "Fishing on the seashore, when you have neither boat nor nets, and can fish only with a line, is a risky trade.

You see you have to wait for the fish or the shell-fish to come, while the fishermen with boats can go out to sea after them. It is so hard to earn a living this way, that I am the only man who fishes on the shore. I pass whole days without catching anything. The only way I get anything is when a crab forgets himself and goes to sleep, as this one did, or a lobster is fool enough to stay on the rocks. Sometimes, after a high sea, the wolf-fish come in, and then I grab them."

"Well, take one day with another, what do you earn?"

"Eleven or twelve sous. I could get along with that if I were alone; but I have my father to support, and the poor man can't help me, for he 's blind."

At that sentence, uttered with perfect simplicity, Pauline and I looked at each other without a word.

"You have a wife or a sweetheart?"

He cast at us one of the most pitiful glances that I ever saw, as he replied:

"If I had a wife, then I should have to let my father go; I could n't support him, and a wife and children too."

"Well, my poor fellow, how is it that you don't try to earn more by carrying salt to the harbour, or by working in the salt marshes?"

"Oh? I could n't do that for three months, monsieur. I am not strong enough; and if I should die, my father would have to beg. What I must have is a trade that requires very little skill and a great deal of patience."

"But how can two people live on twelve sous a day?"

"Oh, monsieur, we eat buckwheat cakes, and barnacles that I take off the rocks."

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-seven."

"Have you ever been away from here?"

"I went to Guérande once, to draw my lot in the draft, and I went to Savenay, to show myself to some gentlemen who measured me. If I had been an inch taller I should have been drafted. I should have died on the first long

march, and my poor father would have been asking alms to-day."

I had thought out many dramas; Pauline was accustomed to intense emotions, living with a man in my condition of health; but neither of us had ever listened to more touching words than those of that fisherman. We walked some distance in silence, both of us measuring the silent depths of that unknown life, admiring the nobility of that self-sacrifice which was unconscious of itself; the strength of his weakness surprised us; that unconscious generosity made us small in our own eyes. I saw that poor creature, all instinct, chained to that rock as a galley-slave is chained to his ball, watching for twenty years for shell-fish to support himself, and sustained in his patience by a single sentiment. How many hours passed on the edge of that beach! how many hopes crushed by a squall, by a change of weather! He hung over the edge of a granite shelf, his arms stretched out like those of an Indian fakir, while his father,

sitting on a stool, waited in silence and darkness for him to bring him the coarsest of shell-fish and of bread, if the sea were willing.

"Do you ever drink wine?" I asked him.

"Three or four times a year."

"Well, you shall drink some to-day, you and your father, and we will send you a white loaf."

"You are very kind, monsieur."

"We will give you your dinner, if you will guide us along the shore as far as Batz, where we are going, to see the tower which overlooks the basin and the coast between Batz and Le Croisic."

"With pleasure," he said. "Go straight ahead, follow the road you are now on; I will overtake you after I have got rid of my fish and my tackle."

We nodded simultaneously, and he hurried off towards the town, light at heart. That meeting held us in the same mental situation in which we were previously, but it had lowered our spirits.

"Poor man!" said Pauline, with that accent which takes away from a woman's compassion whatever there may be offensive in pity; "does it not make one feel ashamed to be happy when one sees such misery?"

"Nothing is more cruel than to have impotent desires," I replied. "Those two poor creatures, father and son, will no more know how keen our sympathy is than the world knows how noble their lives are; for they are laying up treasures in heaven."

"What a wretched country!" she said, as she pointed out to me, along a field surrounded by a loose stone wall, lumps of cow-dung arranged symmetrically. "I asked some one what those were. A peasant woman, who was putting them in place, answered that she was *making wood.* Just fancy, my dear, that when these blocks of dung are dried, these poor people gather them, pile them up, and warm themselves with them. During the winter they are sold, like lumps of peat. And what do you suppose the best paid dress-

maker earns? Five sous a day," she said, after a pause; "but she gets her board."

"See," I said to her, "the winds from the ocean wither or uproot everything; there are no trees; the wrecks of vessels that are beyond use are sold to the rich, for the cost of transportation prevents them from using the firewood in which Brittany abounds. This province is beautiful only to great souls; people without courage could not live here; it is no place for anybody except poets or barnacles. The storehouse for salt had to be built on the cliff, to induce anybody to live in it. On one side, the sea; on the other, the sands; above, space."

We had already passed the town and were within the species of desert which separates Le Croisic from the village of Batz. Imagine, my dear uncle, a plain two leagues in length, covered by the gleaming sand that we see on the seashore. Here and there a few rocks raised their heads, and you would have said that they were gigantic beasts lying among

the dunes. Along the shore there is an occasional reef, about which the waves play, giving them the aspect of great white roses floating on the liquid expanse and coming to rest on the shore. When I saw that plain bounded by the ocean on the right, and on the left by the great lake that flows in between Le Croisic and the sandy heights of Guérande, at the foot of which there are salt marshes absolutely without vegetation, I glanced at Pauline and asked her if she had the courage to defy the heat of the sun, and the strength to walk through the sand.

"I have on high boots; let us go thither," she said, pointing to the tower of Batz, which circumscribed the view by its enormous mass, placed there like a pyramid, but a slender, indented pyramid, so poetically adorned that it allowed the imagination to see in it the first ruins of a great Asiatic city. We walked a few yards and sat down under a rock which was still in the shadow; but it was eleven o'clock in the morning, and that shadow,

which ceased at our feet, rapidly disappeared.

"How beautiful the silence is," she said to me; "and how its intensity is increased by the regular plashing of the sea on the beach!"

"If you choose to abandon your understanding to the three immensities that surround us, the air, the water, and the sand, listening solely to the repeated sound of the flow and the outflow," I replied, "you will not be able to endure its language; you will fancy that you discover therein a thought which will overwhelm you. Yesterday, at sunset, I had that sensation; it prostrated me."

"Oh, yes, let us talk," she said, after a long pause. "No orator can be more terrible than this silence. I fancy that I have discovered the causes of the harmony which surrounds us," she continued. "This landscape, which has only three sharp colours, the brilliant yellow of the sand, the blue of the sky, and the smooth green of the sea, is grand without being wild, it is immense without being a

desert, it is changeless without being monotonous; it has only three elements, but it is diversified."

"Women alone can express their impressions thus," I replied; "you would drive a poet to despair, dear heart, whom I divined so perfectly."

"The excessive noonday heat imparts a gorgeous colour to those three expressions of infinity," replied Pauline, laughing. "I can imagine here the poesy and the passion of the Orient."

"And I can imagine its despair."

"Yes," she said; "that dune is a sublime cloister."

We heard the hurried step of our guide; he had dressed himself in his best clothes. We said a few formal words to him; he evidently saw that our frame of mind had changed, and, with the reserve that misfortune imparts, he kept silent. Although we pressed each other's hands from time to time, to advise each other of the unity of our impressions, we walked

for half an hour in silence, whether because we were overwhelmed by the heat, which rose in shimmering waves from the sand, or because the difficulty of walking absorbed our attention. We walked on, hand in hand, like two children; we should not have taken a dozen steps if we had been arm in arm. The road leading to Batz was not marked out; a gust of wind was enough to efface the foot-prints of horses or the wheel-ruts; but our guide's practised eye recognised the road by the droppings of cattle or of horses. Sometimes it went down towards the sea, sometimes rose towards the upland, at the caprice of the slopes, or to skirt a rock. At noon, we were only half-way.

"We will rest there," said I, pointing to a promontory formed of rocks high enough to lead one to suppose that we should find a grotto there.

When I spoke, the fisherman, who had followed the direction of my finger, shook his head and said:

"There 's some one there! People who go from Batz to Le Croisic, or from Le Croisic to Batz, always make a détour in order not to pass that rock."

The man said this in a low voice, and we divined a mystery.

"Is he a thief, an assassin?"

Our guide replied only by a long-drawn breath which increased our curiosity.

"But will anything happen to us if we pass by there?"

"Oh no!"

"Will you go with us?"

"No, monsieur."

"We will go then, if you assure us that we shall be in no danger."

"I don't say that," replied the fisherman hastily; "I say simply that the man who is there won't say anything to you, or do any harm to you. Oh, bless my soul! he won't so much as move from his place!"

"Who is he, pray?"

"A man!"

Never were two syllables uttered in such a tragic tone. At that moment we were twenty yards from that reef, about which the sea was playing; our guide took the road which skirted the rocks; we went straight ahead, but Pauline took my arm. Our guide quickened his pace in order to reach the spot where the two roads met again at the same time that we did. He evidently supposed that, after seeing the man, we would quicken our pace. That circumstance kindled our curiosity, which then became so intense that our hearts throbbed as if they had felt a thrill of fear. Despite the heat of the day and the fatigue caused by walking through the sand, our hearts were still abandoned to the indescribable languor of a blissful harmony of sensations; they were filled with that pure pleasure which can only be described by comparing it to the pleasure which one feels in listening to some lovely music, like Mozart's *Andiano mio ben.* Do not two pure sentiments, which blend, resemble two beautiful voices singing? In order fully to appreciate

the emotion which seized us, you must share the semivoluptuous condition in which the events of that morning had enveloped us. Gaze for a long while at a turtle-dove perched on a slender twig, near a spring, and you will utter a cry of pain when you see a hawk pounce upon it, bury its steel claws in its heart, and bear it away with the murderous rapidity that powder communicates to the bullet.

When we had walked a yard or two across the open space that lay in front of the grotto, a sort of platform a hundred feet above the ocean, and sheltered from its rage by a succession of steep rocks, we were conscious of an electric shock not unlike that caused by a sudden noise in the midst of the night. We had spied a man seated on a bowlder of granite, and he had looked at us. His glance, like the flash of a cannon, came from two bloodshot eyes, and his stoical immobility could be compared only to the unchanging posture of the masses of granite which surrounded him. His

eyes moved slowly; his body, as if it were petrified, did not move at all. After flashing at us that glance which gave us such a rude shock, he turned his eyes to the vast expanse of the ocean, and gazed at it, despite the dazzling light which rose therefrom, as the eagles are said to gaze at the sun, without lowering the lids, which he did not raise again. Try to recall, my dear uncle, one of those old druidical oaks, whose gnarled trunk, newly stripped of its branches, rises fantastically above a deserted road, and you will have an accurate image of that man. He had one of those shattered herculean frames, and the face of Olympian Jove, but ravaged by age, by the hard toil of the seafaring man, by grief, by coarse food, and blackened as if struck by lightning. As I glanced at his calloused, hairy hands, I saw chords which resembled veins of iron. However, everything about him indicated a robust constitution. I noticed a large quantity of moss in a corner of the grotto, and upon a rough table, hewn out by chance in the midst of

the granite, a broken loaf covering an earthen jug. Never had my imagination, when it carried me back to the deserts where the first hermits of Christianity lived, conceived a face more grandly religious, or more appallingly penitent than was the face of that man.

Even you, who have listened to confessions, my dear uncle, have perhaps never met with such sublime remorse; but that remorse was drowned in the waves of prayer, the incessant prayer of silent despair. That fisherman, that sailor, that rude Breton, was sublime by virtue of some unknown sentiment. But had those eyes wept? Had that statuelike hand struck its fellow man? Was that stern forehead, instinct with pitiless uprightness, on which, however, strength had left those marks of gentleness which are the accompaniment of all true strength—was that forehead, furrowed by wrinkles, in harmony with a noble heart? Why was that man among the granite? Why the granite in that man? Where was the man? Where was the granite? A whole

world of thoughts rushed through our minds. As our guide had anticipated, we had passed in silence, rapidly; and when he met us, we were tremulous with terror, or overwhelmed with amazement. But he did not use the fulfillment of his prediction as a weapon against us.

"Did you see him?" he asked.

"Who is that man?" said I.

"They call him *The Man of the Vow.*"

You can imagine how quickly our two faces turned towards our fisherman at those words! He was a simple-minded man; he understood our silent question; and this is what he said, in his own language, the popular tone of which I shall try to retain:

"Madame, the people of Le Croisic, like the people of Batz, believe that that man is guilty of something, and that he is doing a penance ordered by a famous priest to whom he went to confess, a long way beyond Nantes. Other people think that Cambremer—that's his name—has an evil spell

that he communicates to everybody who passes through the air he breathes. So a good many people, before they pass that rock, look to see what way the wind is. If it 's from *galerne,"* he said, pointing towards the west, "they would n't go on, even if it was a matter of searching for a piece of the true Cross; they turn back, because they 're frightened. Other people, the rich people of Le Croisic, say that he 's made a vow, and that 's why he 's called *The Man of the Vow.* He is always there, night and day; never comes out.

"These reports about him have some appearance of sense. You see," he added, turning to point out a thing which we had not noticed, "he has stuck up there, on the left, a wooden cross, to show that he has put himself under the protection of God, the Blessed Virgin, and the saints. Even if he had n't consecrated himself like that, the fear everybody has of him would make him as safe there as if he were guarded by soldiers. He has n't

said a word since he shut himself up there in the open air; he lives on bread and water that his brother's daughter brings him every morning—a little maid of twelve years, that he 's left his property to; and she 's a pretty thing, as gentle as a lamb, a nice little girl and very clever. She has blue eyes as long as that," he said, holding up his thumb, "and a cherub's head of hair. When any one says to her: 'I say, Pérotte' (that means Pierrette among us," he said, interrupting himself: "she is consecrated to St. Pierre; Cambremer's name is Pierre, and he was her godfather), 'I say, Pérotte, what does your uncle say to you?' 'He don't say anything,' she 'll answer, 'not anything at all, nothing!' 'Well, then, what does he do to you?' 'He kisses me on the forehead Sundays!' 'Are n't you afraid of him?' 'Why no, he 's my godfather.' He won't let any one else bring him anything to eat. Pérotte says that he smiles when she comes; but that 's like a sunbeam in a fog, for they say he 's as gloomy as a fog."

"But," I said, "you arouse our curiosity without gratifying it. Do you know what brought him here? Was it grief, was it repentance, was it insanity, was it a crime, was it——?"

"Oh! only my father and I know the truth of the thing, monsieur. My dead mother worked for a judge to whom Cambremer told the whole story, by the priest's order; for he would n't give him absolution on any other condition, according to what the people at the harbour said. My poor mother overheard what Cambremer said, without meaning to, because the judge's kitchen was right next to his study, and she listened. She's dead, and the judge who heard him is dead. My mother made father and me promise never to tell anything to the people about here; but I can tell you that the night my mother told it to us, the hair on my head turned gray."

"Well, tell us, my fine fellow; we will not mention it to anybody."

A Seashore Drama

The fisherman looked at us, and continued thus:

"Pierre Cambremer, whom you saw yonder, is the oldest of the Cambremers, who have always been sailors, from father to son; that 's what their name says—the sea has always bent under them. The man you saw was a boat fisherman. So he had boats and went sardine-fishing; he went deep-sea fishing, too, for the dealers. He 'd have fitted out a vessel and gone after cod, if he had n't been so fond of his wife; a fine woman she was, a Brouin from Guérande; a magnificent girl, and she had a big heart. She was so fond of Cambremer that she 'd never let her man leave her any longer than he had to, to go after sardines. They used to live over there —look!" said the fisherman, ascending a hillock to point to an islet in the little inland sea between the dunes, across which we were walking, and the salt marshes of Guérande. "Do you see that house? That was his.

"Jacquette Brouin and Cambremer never

had but one child, a boy; and they loved him like—like what shall I say?—indeed, like people love their only child; they were mad over him. If their little Jacques had put dirt in the saucepan, saving your presence, they 'd have thought it was sugar. How many times we 've seen 'em at the fair, buying the prettiest fallals for him! It was all nonsense — everybody told 'em so. Little Cambremer, seeing that he was allowed to do whatever he wanted to, became as big a rogue as a red ass. When any one went to the elder Cambremer and told him: 'Your boy nearly killed little So-and-so,' he 'd laugh and say: 'Bah! he 'll make a fine sailor! he 'll command the king's fleet.' And when somebody else said: 'Pierre Cambremer, do you know that your boy put out the little Pougaud girl's eye?' Pierre said: 'He 'll be fond of the girls!' He thought everything was all right. So my little scamp, when he was ten years old, used to be at everybody and amuse himself cutting off hens' heads,

cutting pigs open; in short, he rolled in blood like a polecat. 'He 'll make a famous soldier!' Cambremer would say; 'he 's got a taste for blood.' I remembered all that, you see," said the fisherman.

"And so did Cambremer too," he continued after a pause. "When he got to be fifteen or sixteen years old, Jacques Cambremer was — what shall I say? — a shark. He used to go to Guérande to enjoy himself, or to Savenay to make love to the girls. Then he began to steal from his mother, who did n't dare to say anything to her husband. Cambremer was so honest that he 'd travel twenty leagues to pay back two sous, if he had been overpaid in settling an account. At last the day came when his mother was stripped clean. While his father was away fishing, the boy carried off the sideboard, the dishes, the sheets, the linen, and left just the four walls; he 'd sold everything to get money to go to Nantes and raise the devil. The poor woman cried for whole days and nights. She could n't help

telling the father about that, when he came home; and she was afraid of the father — not for herself, oh no! When Pierre Cambremer came home and found his house furnished with things people had lent his wife, he said:

"'What does all this mean?'

"The poor woman was nearer dead than alive.

"'We've been robbed,' said she.

"'Where's Jacques?'

"'Jacques is on a spree.'

"No one knew where the villain had gone.

"'He goes on too many sprees!' said Pierre.

"Six months later, the poor man learned that his son was in danger of falling into the hands of justice at Nantes. He went there on foot; made the journey faster than he could have gone by sea, got hold of his son, and brought him back here. He did n't ask him: 'What have you been doing?' He just said to him:

"'If you don't behave yourself here with

your mother and me for two years, going fishing and acting like an honest man, you 'll have an account to settle with me!'

"The idiot, counting on his father's and mother's stupidity, made a face at him. At that Pierre fetched him a crack that laid Master Jacques up in bed for six months. The poor mother almost died of grief. One night, when she was sleeping peacefully by her husband's side, she heard a noise, got out of bed, and got a knife-cut on her arm. She shrieked and some one brought a light. Pierre Cambremer found his wife wounded; he thought that a robber did it — as if there was any such thing in our province, where you can carry ten thousand francs in gold from Le Croisic to St.-Nazaire, without fear, and without once being asked what you 've got under your arm! Pierre looked for Jacques, but could n't find him.

"In the morning, the little monster had the face to come home and say that he 'd been to Batz. I must tell you that his mother did n't

know where to hide her money. Cambremer always left his with Monsieur Dupotet at Le Croisic. Their son's wild ways had eaten up crowns by the hundred, francs by the hundred, and louis d'or; they were almost ruined, and that was pretty hard for folks who used to have about twelve thousand francs, including their island. No one knew what Cambremer paid out at Nantes to clear his son. Bad luck raised the deuce with the family. Cambremer's brother was in a bad way and needed help. To encourage him, Pierre told him that Jacques and Pérotte (the younger Cambremer's daughter) should marry. Then he employed him in the fishing, so that he could earn his living; for Joseph Cambremer was reduced to living by his work. His wife had died of a fever, and he had had to pay for a wet-nurse for Pérotte. Pierre Cambremer's wife owed a hundred francs to different people on the little girl's account, for linen and clothes, and for two or three months' wages for that big Frelu girl, who had a child by Simon Gaudry,

and who nursed Pérotte. Mère Cambremer had sewed a Spanish coin into the cover of her mattress, and marked it: 'For Pérotte.' She had had a good education; she could write like a clerk, and she'd taught her son to read; that was the ruin of him. No one knew how it happened, but that scamp of a Jacques scented the gold, stole it, and went off to Le Croisic on a spree.

"As luck would have it, Goodman Cambremer came in with his boat. As he approached the beach, he saw a piece of paper floating; he picked it up and took it in to his wife, who fell flat when she recognised her own written words. Cambremer did n't say anything, but he went to Le Croisic, and found out that his son was playing billiards; then he sent for the good woman who keeps the café, and said:

"'I told Jacques not to spend a gold-piece that he'll pay you with; I'll wait outside; you bring it to me, and I'll give you silver for it.'

"The good woman brought him the money. Cambremer took it, said: 'All right!' and went home. The whole town heard about that. But here 's something that I know, and that other people only suspect in a general way. He told his wife to clean up their room, which was on the ground floor; he made a fire on the hearth, lighted two candles, placed two chairs on one side of the fireplace and a stool on the other. Then he told his wife to put out his wedding clothes and to get into her own. When he was dressed, he went to his brother and told him to watch in front of the house and tell him if he heard any noise on either of the beaches, this one or the one in front of the Guérande salt marshes. When he thought that his wife was dressed, he went home again, loaded a gun, and put it out of sight in the corner of the fireplace. Jacques came at last; it was late; he had been drinking and playing billiards till ten o'clock; he had come home by the point of Carnouf. His uncle heard him hailing, crossed to the beach

in front of the marsh to fetch him, and rowed him to the island without a word. When he went into the house, his father said to him:

"'Sit down there,' pointing to the stool. 'You are before your father and mother, whom you have outraged, and who have got to try you.'

"Jacques began to bellow, because Cambremer's face was working in a strange way. The mother sat as stiff as an oar.

"'If you call out, if you move, if you don't sit on your stool as straight as a mast, I 'll shoot you like a dog,' said Pierre, pointing his gun at him.

"The son was dumb as a fish; the mother did n't say anything.

"'Here,' said Pierre to his son, 'is a paper that was wrapped round a Spanish gold-piece; the gold-piece was in your mother's bed; nobody else knew where she had put it; I found the paper on the water as I was coming ashore; you gave this Spanish gold-piece to

Mother Fleurant to-night, and your mother can't find hers in her bed. Explain yourself!'

"Jacques said that he did n't take the money from his mother, and that he had had the coin ever since he went to Nantes.

"'So much the better,' said Pierre. 'How can you prove it?'

"'I had it before.'

"'You did n't take your mother's?'

"'No.'

"'Will you swear it by your everlasting life?'

"He was going to swear; his mother looked up at him and said:

"'Jacques, my child, be careful; don't swear, if it isn't true. You may mend your ways and repent; there 's time enough still.'

"And she began to cry.

"'You 're neither one thing nor the other,' he said, 'and you 've always wanted to ruin me.'

"Cambremer turned pale, and said:

"'What you just said to your mother will

lengthen your account. Come to the point! Will you swear?'

"'Yes.'

"'See,' said Pierre, 'did your piece have this cross which the sardine-dealer who paid it to me had made on ours?'

"Jacques sobered off, and began to cry.

"'Enough talk,' said Pierre. 'I don't say anything about what you 've done before this. I don't propose that a Cambremer shall be put to death on the public square at Le Croisic. Say your prayers, and make haste! A priest is coming to confess you.'

"The mother went out, so that she need n't hear her son's sentence. When she had left the room, Cambremer the uncle arrived with the rector of Piriac; but Jacques would n't say anything to him. He was sly; he knew his father well enough to be sure that he would n't kill him without confession.

"'Thank you, monsieur; excuse us,' said Cambremer to the priest, when he saw that Jacques was obstinate. 'I meant to give my

son a lesson, and I ask you not to say anything about it.—If you don't mend your ways,' he said to Jacques, 'the next time will be the last, and I 'll put an end to it without confession.'

"He sent him off to bed. The boy believed what he had heard and imagined that he could arrange matters with his father. He went to sleep. The father sat up. When he saw that his son was sound asleep, he stuffed his mouth with hemp and tied a strip of canvas over it very tight; then he bound his hands and feet. Jacques stormed and wept blood, so Cambremer told the judge. What could you expect! The mother threw herself at the father's feet.

"'He has been tried,' he said; 'you must help me put him in the boat.'

"She refused. Cambremer took him to the boat all alone, laid him in the bottom, tied a stone round his neck, and rowed abreast of the rock where he is now. Then the poor mother, who had got her brother-in-law to bring her over here, cried: 'Mercy!' All in

vain; it had the effect of a stone thrown at a wolf. The moon was shining; she saw the father throw their son into the water, the son to whom her heart still clung; and as there was n't any wind, she heard a splash, then nothing more, not a sound or a bubble; the sea 's a famous keeper, I tell you! When he came ashore here to quiet his wife, who was groaning, Cambremer found her about the same as dead. The two brothers could n't carry her, so they had to put her in the boat that had just held the son, and they took her home, going round through Le Croisic passage. Ah! *La Belle Brouin,* as they called her, did n't last a week. She died asking her husband to burn the accursed boat. He did it, too. As for him, he was like a crazy man; he did n't know what he wanted, and he staggered when he walked, like a man who can't carry his wine. Then he went off for ten days, and when he came back he planted himself where you saw him, and since he 's been there he has n't said a word."

The fisherman took only a moment or two in telling us this story, and he told it even more simply than I have written it. The common people make few comments when they tell a story; they select the point that has made an impression on them, and interpret it as they feel it. That narrative was as sharp and incisive as a blow with an axe.

"I shall not go to Batz," said Pauline, as we reached the upper end of the lake.

We returned to Le Croisic by way of the salt marshes, guided through their labyrinth by a fisherman who had become as silent as we. The current of our thoughts had changed. We were both absorbed by depressing reflections, saddened by that drama which explained the swift presentiment that we had felt at the sight of Cambremer. We both had sufficient knowledge of the world to divine all that our guide had not told us of that triple life. The misfortunes of those three people were reproduced before us as if we had seen them in the successive scenes of a

drama, to which that father, by thus expiating his necessary crime, had added the dénouement. We dared not look back at that fatal man who terrified a whole province.

A few clouds darkened the sky; vapours were rising along the horizon. We were walking through the most distressingly desolate tract of land that I have ever seen; the very soil beneath our feet seemed sickly and suffering — salt marshes, which may justly be termed the scrofula of the earth. There the ground is divided into parcels of unequal size, all enclosed by enormous heaps of gray earth, and filled with brackish water, to the surface of which the salt rises. These ravines, made by the hand of man, are subdivided by causeways along which workmen walk, armed with long rakes, with which they skim off the brine, and carry the salt to round platforms built here and there, when it is in condition to pile. For two hours we skirted that dismal checker-board, where the salt is so abundant that it chokes the vegetation, and

where we saw no other living beings than an occasional *paludier*—the name given to the men who gather the salt. These men, or rather this tribe of Bretons, wear a special costume: a white jacket not unlike that worn by brewers. They intermarry, and there has never been an instance of a girl of that tribe marrying anybody except a *paludier*. The ghastly aspect of those swamps, where the surface of the mire is neatly raked, and of that grayish soil, which the Breton flora holds in horror, harmonised with the mourning of our hearts. When we reached the place where we were to cross the arm of the sea which is formed by the eruption of the water into that basin, and which serves doubtless to supply the salt marshes with their staple, we rejoiced to see the meagre vegetation scattered along the sandy shore. As we crossed, we saw, in the centre of the lake, the islet where the Cambremers lived; we looked the other way.

When we reached our hotel, we noticed a billiard-table in a room on the ground floor;

and, when we learned that it was the only public billiard-table in Le Croisic, we prepared for our departure that night. The next day we were at Guérande. Pauline was still depressed, and I could already feel the coming of the flame that is consuming my brain. I was so cruelly tormented by my visions of those three lives that she said to me:

"Write the story, Louis; in that way you will change the nature of this fever."

So I have written it down for you, my dear uncle; but it has already destroyed the tranquillity that I owed to the sea-baths and to our visit here.

1835.

An Episode under the Terror

To Monsieur Guyonnet-Merville:

Would it not be well for me, my dear former master, to explain to those people who are curious to know everything, where I was able to learn enough of legal procedure to manage the business of my little circle, and at the same time to consecrate here the memory of the amiable and intellectual man who said to Scribe, another amateur lawyer, on meeting him at a ball: "Go to the office—I promise you that there is work enough there"? But do you need this public testimony in order to be assured of the author's affection?

De Balzac.

An Episode under the Terror

ON the twenty-second of January, 1793, about eight o'clock in the evening, an old lady was descending the steep hill which ends in front of the church of St.-Laurent, on Faubourg St.-Martin, Paris. It had snowed so hard all day that footfalls could scarcely be heard. The streets were deserted; the not unnatural dread inspired by the silence was intensified by the terror under which France was then groaning; so that the old lady had not as yet met anybody; her sight, which had long been poor, made it impossible for her to see, in the distance, by the dim light of the street-lanterns, the few people who were scattered about like ghosts in the broad highway of the faubourg. She went her way courageously, alone, through that solitude, as if her age were a talisman certain to preserve her from all evil.

When she had passed Rue des Morts, she fancied that she could distinguish the firm and heavy step of a man walking behind her. It seemed to her that it was not the first time that she had heard that sound; she was terrified at the thought that she had been followed, and she tried to walk even faster, in order to reach a brightly lighted shop, hoping to be able to set at rest in the light the suspicions which had seized her. As soon as she had stepped beyond the horizontal rays of light that shone from the shop, she suddenly turned her head and caught sight of a human figure in the fog; that indistinct glimpse was enough for her; she staggered for an instant under the weight of the fear which oppressed her, for she no longer doubted that she had been attended by the stranger from the first step that she had taken outside of her home; and the frantic longing to escape a spy gave her additional strength. Incapable of reasoning, she quickened her pace, as if she could possibly elude a man who was

surely more active than she. After running for some minutes, she reached a pastry-cook's shop, rushed in, and fell rather than sat down upon a chair in front of the counter.

The instant that she rattled the latch of the door, a young woman, who was engaged in embroidering, raised her eyes, recognised through the glass door the old-fashioned mantle of violet silk in which the old lady was wrapped, and hastily opened a drawer, as if to take out something which she intended to give her. Not only did the young woman's movement and expression denote a wish to be rid of the stranger at once, as if she were one of those people whom one is not glad to see, but she also uttered an impatient exclamation when she found the drawer empty; then, without glancing at the lady, she rushed from behind the counter, towards the back-shop, and called her husband, who appeared instantly.

"Where have you put —— ——?" she asked him with a mysterious expression,

indicating the old lady by a glance, and not finishing her sentence.

Although the pastry-cook could see only the enormous black silk bonnet, surrounded by violet ribbons, which the stranger wore upon her head, he disappeared, after a glance at his wife, which seemed to say: "Do you suppose that I am going to leave *that* on your counter?"

Amazed by the old lady's silence and immobility, the trades-woman walked towards her, and as she examined her she was conscious of a feeling of compassion, and perhaps of curiosity as well. Although the stranger's complexion was naturally sallow, like that of a person vowed to secret austerities, it was easy to see that some recent emotion had made her even paler than usual. Her bonnet was so arranged as to conceal her hair, which was presumably whitened by age, for the neatness of the collar of her dress indicated that she did not wear powder. That lack of adornment imparted to her face a sort of religious asceticism. Her features were serious

and dignified. In the old days the manners and customs of people of quality were so different from those of people belonging to the lower classes, that one could easily distinguish a person of noble birth. So that the young woman was convinced that the stranger was a *ci-devant,* and that she had belonged to the court.

"Madame," she said involuntarily and with respect, forgetting that that title was proscribed.

The old lady did not reply. She kept her eyes fastened upon the shop-window, as if some terrifying object were there apparent.

"What 's the matter with you, citizeness?" asked the proprietor, who reappeared at that moment.

The citizen pastry-cook aroused the lady from her revery by handing her a little pasteboard box covered with blue paper.

"Nothing, nothing, my friends," she replied in a mild voice.

She looked up at the pastry-cook as if to

bestow a grateful glance upon him; but when she saw a red cap on his head she uttered an exclamation:

"Ah! you have betrayed me!"

The young woman and her husband replied by a gesture of horror which made the stranger blush, perhaps for having suspected them, perhaps with pleasure.

"Excuse me," she said with childlike gentleness.

Then, taking a louis d'or from her pocket, she handed it to the pastry-cook.

"This is the price agreed upon," she added.

There is a sort of poverty which the poor are quick to divine. The pastry-cook and his wife looked at each other and then at the old lady, exchanging the same thought. That louis d'or was evidently the last. The lady's hands trembled as she held out that coin, at which she gazed sorrowfully but without avarice; but she seemed to realise the full extent of the sacrifice. Fasting and poverty were written upon that face, in lines as legible

as those of fear and ascetic habits. There were vestiges of past splendour in her clothes: they were worn silk; a neat though old-fashioned cloak, and lace carefully mended — in a word, the rags and tatters of opulence. The trades-people, wavering between pity and self-interest, began by relieving their consciences in words:

"But, citizeness, you seem very weak——"

"Would madame like something to refresh herself?" asked the woman, cutting her husband short.

"We have some very good soup," added the pastry-cook.

"It's so cold! perhaps madame was chilled by her walk? But you can rest here and warm yourself a little."

"The devil is not as black as he is painted," cried the pastry-cook.

Won by the kind tone of the charitable shopkeeper's words, the lady admitted that she had been followed by a stranger, and that she was afraid to return home alone.

"Is that all?" replied the man with the red cap. "Wait for me, citizeness."

He gave the louis to his wife; then, impelled by that species of gratitude which finds its way into the heart of a tradesman when he receives an extravagant price for goods of moderate value, he went to don his National guardsman's uniform, took his hat, thrust his sabre into his belt, and reappeared under arms. But his wife had had time to reflect; and, as in many other hearts, reflection closed the open hand of kindliness. Perturbed in mind, and fearing that her husband might become involved in some dangerous affair, the pastry-cook's wife tried to stop him by pulling the skirt of his coat; but, obeying a charitable impulse, the good man at once offered to escort the old lady.

"It seems that the man who frightened the citizeness is still prowling about the shop," said the young woman, nervously.

"I am afraid so," the lady artlessly replied.

"Suppose he should be a spy? Suppose

it was a conspiracy? Don't go with her, and take back the box."

These words, whispered in the pastry-cook's ear by his wife, congealed the impromptu courage which had moved him.

"I'll just go out and say two words to him, and rid you of him in short order!" cried the man, opening the door and rushing out.

The old lady, passive as a child and almost dazed, resumed her seat. The worthy tradesman soon reappeared; his face, which was naturally red, and moreover was flushed by the heat of his ovens, had suddenly become livid; he was so terribly frightened that his legs trembled and his eyes resembled a drunken man's.

"Do you mean to have our heads cut off, you miserable aristocrat?" he cried angrily. "Just let us see your heels; don't ever show your face here again, and don't count on me to supply you with materials for a conspiracy!"

As he spoke, the pastry-cook tried to take from the old lady the small box, which she

had put in one of her pockets. But no sooner did the man's insolent hands touch her clothing, than the stranger, preferring to brave the dangers of the street with no other defender than God, rather than to lose what she had purchased, recovered the agility of her youth; she rushed to the door, opened it abruptly, and vanished from the eyes of the dazed and trembling woman and her husband.

As soon as the stranger was out of doors, she walked rapidly away; but her strength failed her, for she heard the snow creak beneath the heavy step of the spy, by whom she was pitilessly followed. She was obliged to stop, and he stopped; she dared neither speak to him nor look at him, whether as a result of the fear which gripped her heart, or from lack of intelligence. She continued her way, walking slowly; thereupon the man slackened his pace, so as to remain at a distance, which enabled him to keep his eye upon her. He seemed to be the very shadow of the old woman. The clock was striking

nine when the silent couple again passed the church of St.-Laurent. It is in the nature of all souls, even the weakest, that a feeling of tranquillity should succeed violent agitation; for, although our feelings are manifold, our bodily powers are limited. And so the stranger, meeting with no injury at the hands of her supposed persecutor, chose to discover in him a secret friend, zealous to protect her; she recalled all the circumstances which had attended the unknown's appearance, as if to find plausible arguments in favour of that comforting opinion; and she took pleasure in detecting good rather than evil intentions in his behaviour.

Forgetting the terror which that man had inspired in the pastry-cook, she walked with an assured step into the upper parts of Faubourg St.-Martin. After half an hour she reached a house near the junction of the main street of the faubourg and that which leads to the Barrière de Pantin. Even to-day, that spot is one of the most solitary in all Paris.

The north wind, blowing over the Buttes Chaumont and from Belleville, whistled through the houses, or rather the hovels, scattered about in that almost uninhabited valley, where the dividing walls are built of earth and bones. That desolate spot seemed to be the natural refuge of poverty and despair. The man who had persisted in following the wretched creature who was bold enough to walk through those silent streets at night, seemed impressed by the spectacle presented to his eyes. He became thoughtful, and stood in evident hesitation, in the dim light of a lantern whose feeble rays barely pierced the mist.

Fear gave eyes to the old woman, who fancied that she could detect something sinister in the stranger's features; her former terror reawoke, and, taking advantage of the uncertainty which had checked his advance, to glide in the darkness towards the door of the solitary house, she pressed a spring and disappeared with magical rapidity.

The stranger, motionless as a statue, gazed

at that house, which was in some measure the type of the wretched dwellings of the faubourg. That unstable hovel, built of rough stones, was covered with a layer of yellow plaster, so cracked that it seemed in danger of falling before the slightest gust of wind. The roof, of dark brown tiles covered with moss, had sunk in several places so that it seemed likely to give way under the weight of the snow. On each floor there were three windows, the sashes of which, rotted by the dampness and shrunken by the heat of the sun, made it clear that the cold air must find an easy entrance into the rooms. That isolated house resembled an old tower which time had forgotten to destroy. A faint light shone through the irregular windows of the attic at the top of the tumble-down structure, while all the rest of the house was in absolute darkness. The old woman climbed, not without difficulty, the steep, rough staircase, which was supplied with a rope instead of a baluster; she knocked softly at the door

of the apartment in the attic, and dropped hastily upon a chair which an old man offered her.

"Hide! hide yourself!" she said. "Although we go out very seldom, everything that we do is known; our footsteps are watched."

"What is there new, pray?" asked another old woman who was seated by the fire.

"The man who was prowling around the house last night followed me to-night."

At these words the three occupants of the attic looked at each other with indications of profound terror on their faces. The old man was the least moved of the three, perhaps because he was in the greatest danger. Under the weight of a great calamity, or under the yoke of persecution, a courageous man begins, so to speak, by preparing to sacrifice himself; he looks upon his days simply as so many victories over destiny. The eyes of the two women, fastened upon this old man, made it easy to divine that he was the sole object of their intense anxiety.

"Why despair of God, my sisters?" he said in a low but powerful voice. "We sang His praises amid the cries of the assassins and the shrieks of the dying at the Carmelite convent. If He decreed that I should be saved from that butchery, it was doubtless because He reserved me for another destiny, which I must accept without a murmur. God protects His people, He may dispose of them at His pleasure. It is of you, not of me, we must think."

"No," said one of the old women; "what are our lives compared with that of a priest?"

"When once I found myself outside of the Abbey of Chelles, I looked upon myself as dead," said that one of the two women who had not gone out.

"Here," replied the other, handing the priest the little box, "here are the wafers.—But," she cried, "I hear some one coming up the stairs."

Thereupon all three listened intently. The noise ceased.

"Do not be alarmed," said the priest, "if

some one should try to enter. A person upon whose fidelity we can rely has undoubtedly taken all necessary measures to cross the frontier, and will come here to get the letters which I have written to the Duc de Langeais and to the Marquis de Beauséant, asking them to consider the means of rescuing you from this terrible country, from the death or destitution which awaits you here."

"Then you do not mean to go with us?" cried the two nuns gently, with manifestations of despair.

"My place is where there are victims," said the priest simply.

They held their peace and gazed at their companion with devout admiration.

"Sister Martha," he said, addressing the nun who had gone to buy the wafers, "the messenger I speak of will reply '*Fiat voluntas*' to the word '*Hosanna.*'"

"There is some one on the stairs!" cried the other nun, opening the door of a hiding-place under the lower part of the roof.

This time they could plainly hear, amid the profound silence, the footsteps of a man upon the stairs, which were covered with ridges of hardened mud. The priest crept with difficulty into a sort of cupboard, and the nuns threw over him a few pieces of apparel.

"You may close the door, Sister Agatha," he said in a muffled voice.

The priest was hardly hidden when three taps on the door caused a shock to the two holy women, who consulted each other with their eyes, afraid to utter a single word. Each of them seemed to be about sixty years old. Secluded from the world for forty years, they were like plants habituated to the air of a hothouse, which wilt if they are taken from it. Accustomed to the life of a convent, they were unable to imagine any other life. One morning, their gratings having been shattered, they shuddered to find themselves free. One can readily imagine the species of imbecility which the events of the Revolution had produced in their innocent minds. Incapable of

reconciling their conventual ideas with the difficult problems of life, and not even understanding their situation, they resembled children who had been zealously cared for hitherto, and who, deserted by their motherly protector, prayed instead of weeping. And so, in face of the danger which they apprehended at that moment, they remained mute and passive, having no conception of any other defence than Christian resignation.

The man who desired to enter interpreted that silence to suit himself; he opened the door and appeared abruptly before them. The two nuns shuddered as they recognised the man who had been prowling about their house, making inquiries about them, for some time. They did not move, but gazed at him with anxious curiosity, after the manner of the children of savage tribes, who examine strangers in silence. He was tall and stout; but there was nothing in his manner, or appearance, to indicate an evil-minded man. He imitated the immobility of the nuns,

and moved his eyes slowly about the room in which he stood.

Two straw mats, laid upon boards, served the two nuns as beds. There was a single table in the centre of the room, and upon it a copper candlestick, a few plates, three knives, and a round loaf. The fire on the hearth was very low, and a few sticks of wood piled in a corner testified to the poverty of the two occupants. The walls, covered with an ancient layer of paint, demonstrated the wretched condition of the roof, for stains like brown threads marked the intrusion of the rain-water. A relic, rescued doubtless during the pillage of the Abbey of Chelles, adorned the mantel. Three chairs, two chests, and a wretched commode completed the furniture of the room. A door beside the chimney indicated the existence of an inner chamber.

The inventory of the cell was speedily made by the person who had thrust himself into the bosom of that group under such alarming auspices. A sentiment of compassion was

expressed upon his face, and he cast a kindly glance upon the two women, but seemed at least as embarrassed as they. The strange silence preserved by all three lasted but a short time, for the stranger at last divined the mental weakness and the inexperience of the two poor creatures, and he said to them in a voice which he tried to soften: "I do not come here as an enemy, citizenesses."

He paused, and then resumed: "My sisters, if any misfortune should happen to you, be sure that I have had no part in it. I have a favour to ask of you."

They still remained silent.

"If I annoy you, if I embarrass you, tell me so frankly, and I will go; but understand that I am entirely devoted to you; that if there is any service that I can do you, you may employ me without fear; that I alone perhaps am above the law, as there is no longer a king."

There was such a ring of truth in these words that Sister Agatha, the one of the two

nuns who belonged to the family of Langeais, and whose manners seemed to indicate that she had formerly been familiar with magnificent festivities and had breathed the air of courts, instantly pointed to one of the chairs, as if to request their guest to be seated. The stranger manifested a sort of mixture of pleasure and melancholy when he saw that gesture; and he waited until the two venerable women were seated, before seating himself.

"You have given shelter," he continued, "to a venerable unsworn priest, who miraculously escaped the massacre at the Carmelite convent."

"*Hosanna!*" said Sister Agatha, interrupting the stranger, and gazing at him with anxious interest.

"I don't think that that is his name," he replied.

"But, monsieur," said Sister Martha hastily, "we have n't any priest here, and——"

"In that case you must be more careful and more prudent," retorted the stranger gently,

reaching to the table and taking up a breviary. "I do not believe that you know Latin, and ——"

He did not continue, for the extraordinary emotion depicted on the faces of the unhappy nuns made him feel that he had gone too far; they were trembling, and their eyes were filled with tears.

"Do not be alarmed," he said to them cheerily; "I know the name of your guest and your names; and three days ago I was informed of your destitution and of your devotion to the venerable Abbé of ——"

"Hush!" said Sister Agatha innocently, putting her finger to her lips.

"You see, my sisters, that if I had formed the detestable plan of betraying you, I might already have done it more than once."

When he heard these words, the priest emerged from his prison and appeared in the middle of the room.

"I cannot believe, monsieur," he said to the stranger, "that you are one of our persecut-

ors, and I trust you. What do you want with me?"

The priest's saintlike confidence, the nobility of soul that shone in all his features, would have disarmed an assassin. The mysterious personage who had enlivened that scene of destitution and resignation gazed for a moment at the group formed by those three; then he assumed a confidential tone, and addressed the priest in these words:

"Father, I have come to implore you to celebrate a mortuary mass for the repose of the soul of a—a consecrated person, whose body, however, will never lie in holy ground."

The priest involuntarily shuddered. The two nuns, not understanding as yet to whom the stranger referred, stood with necks outstretched, and faces turned towards the two men, in an attitude of intense curiosity. The priest scrutinised the stranger; unfeigned anxiety was depicted upon his face, and his eyes expressed the most ardent entreaty.

"Very well," replied the priest; "to-night,

at midnight, return here, and I shall be ready to celebrate the only funeral service which we can offer in expiation of the crime to which you refer."

The stranger started; but a feeling of satisfaction, at once grateful and solemn, seemed to triumph over some secret grief. Having respectfully saluted the priest and the two holy women, he disappeared, manifesting a sort of mute gratitude which was understood by those three noble hearts. About two hours after this scene the stranger returned, knocked softly at the attic door, and was admitted by Mademoiselle de Beauséant, who escorted him into the second room of that humble lodging, where everything had been prepared for the ceremony.

Between two flues of the chimney, the nuns had placed the old commode, whose antiquated shape was covered by a magnificent altar-cloth of green silk. A large crucifix of ebony and ivory, fastened upon the discoloured wall, heightened the effect of its

bareness and inevitably attracted the eye. Four slender little tapers, which the sisters had succeeded in standing upon that improvised altar by fixing them in sealing-wax, cast a pale light, which the wall reflected dimly. That faint gleam barely lighted the rest of the room; but, in that it confined its illumination to the consecrated objects, it resembled a ray of light from heaven upon that undecorated altar. The floor was damp. The attic roof, which sloped sharply on both sides, had various cracks through which a biting wind blew. Nothing less stately could be imagined, and yet perhaps there could be nothing more solemn than this lugubrious ceremony.

A silence so profound that it would have enabled them to hear the faintest sound on distant thoroughfares, diffused a sort of sombre majesty over that nocturnal scene. In short, the grandeur of the occasion contrasted so strikingly with the poverty of the surroundings that the result was a sensation of

religious awe. The two old nuns, kneeling on the damp floor on either side of the altar, heedless of the deadly moisture, prayed in unison with the priest, who, clad in his pontifical vestments, prepared a golden chalice adorned with precious stones, a consecrated vessel rescued doubtless from the plunderers of the Abbey of Chelles. Beside that pyx, an object of regal magnificence, were the water and wine destined for the sacrament, in two glasses hardly worthy of the lowest tavern. In default of a missal, the priest had placed his breviary on a corner of the altar. A common plate was provided for the washing of those innocent hands, pure of bloodshed. All was majestic, and yet paltry; poor, but noble; profane and holy in one. The stranger knelt piously between the two nuns. But suddenly, when he noticed a band of crape on the chalice and on the crucifix—for, having nothing to indicate the purpose of that mortuary mass, the priest had draped God Himself in mourning—he was assailed

by such an overpowering memory that drops of sweat gathered upon his broad forehead. The four silent actors in that scene gazed at each other mysteriously; then their hearts, acting upon one another, communicated their sentiments to each other and became blended into the one emotion of religious pity; it was as if their thoughts had evoked the royal martyr whose remains had been consumed by quicklime, but whose shade stood before them in all its royal majesty. They celebrated an *obit* without the body of the deceased. Beneath those disjointed tiles and laths, four Christians interceded with God for a king of France, and performed his obsequies without a bier. It was the purest of all possible devotions, an amazing act of fidelity performed without one thought of self. Doubtless, in the eyes of God, it was like the glass of water which is equal to the greatest virtues. The whole of monarchy was there, in the prayers of a priest and of two poor nuns; but perhaps the Revolution, too, was represented, by that

man whose face betrayed too much remorse not to cause a belief that he was acting in obedience to an impulse of unbounded repentance.

Instead of saying the Latin words: *"Introibo ad altare Dei,"* etc., the priest, obeying a divine inspiration, looked at the three persons who represented Christian France, and said to them, in words which effaced the poverty of that wretched place:

"We are about to enter into God's sanctuary!"

At these words, uttered with most impressive unction, a thrill of holy awe seized the stranger and the two nuns. Not beneath the arches of St. Peter's at Rome could God have appeared with more majesty than He then appeared in that abode of poverty, before the eyes of those Christians; so true it is that between man and Him every intermediary seems useless, and that He derives His grandeur from Himself alone. The stranger's fervour was genuine, so that the sentiment

which joined the prayers of those four servants of God and the king was unanimous. The sacred words rang out like celestial music amid the silence. There was a moment when tears choked the stranger's voice; it was during the paternoster. The priest added to it this Latin prayer, which the stranger evidently understood: "*Et remitte scelus regicidis sicut Ludovicus eis remisit semetipse!* (And forgive the regicides even as Louis XVI. himself forgave them!)."

The two nuns saw two great tears leave a moist trace on the manly cheeks of the stranger, and fall to the floor. The Office of the Dead was recited. The *Domine salvum fac regem,* chanted in a low voice, touched the hearts of those faithful royalists, who reflected that the infant king, for whom they were praying to the Most High at that moment, was a prisoner in the hands of his enemies. The stranger shuddered at the thought that there might still be committed a new crime, in which he would doubtless be compelled to

take part. When the service was at an end, the priest motioned to the two nuns to withdraw. As soon as he was alone with the stranger, he walked towards him with a mild and melancholy expression, and said to him in a fatherly tone:

"My son, if you have dipped your hands in the blood of the martyr king, confess to me. There is no sin which, in God's eyes, may not be effaced by repentance so touching and so sincere as yours seems to be."

At the first words of the priest, the stranger made an involuntary gesture of terror; but his face resumed its tranquillity, and he met the astonished priest's eye with calm assurance.

"Father," he said to him in a perceptibly tremulous voice, "no one is more innocent than I of bloodshed."

"I am bound to believe you," said the priest.

There was a pause, during which he examined the penitent more closely; then, persisting in taking him for one of those timid

members of the Convention who sacrificed a consecrated and inviolate head in order to preserve their own, he continued in a solemn voice:

"Remember, my son, that to be absolved from that great crime, it is not enough not to have actually taken part in it. Those who, when they might have defended their king, left their swords in the scabbard, will have a very heavy account to settle with the King of Heaven. Ah, yes!" added the old priest, shaking his head with a most expressive movement, "yes, very heavy! for, by remaining idle, they became the involuntary accomplices of that ghastly crime."

"Do you think," inquired the thunderstruck stranger, "that indirect participation will be punished? Is the soldier guilty who is ordered to join the shooting-squad?"

The priest hesitated. Pleased with the dilemma in which he had placed that puritan of royalty by planting him between the dogma of passive obedience, which, according to the

partisans of monarchy, should be predominant in all military codes, and the no less important dogma which sanctifies the respect due to the person of kings, the stranger was too quick to see in the priest's hesitation a favourable solution of the doubts by which he seemed to be perturbed. Then, in order to give the venerable Jansenist no longer time to reflect, he said to him:

"I should blush to offer you any sort of compensation for the funeral service which you have just performed for the repose of the king's soul and for the relief of my conscience. A thing of inestimable value can be paid for only by an offering which is beyond all price. Deign, therefore, to accept, monsieur, the gift that I offer you of a blessed relic. The day will come, perhaps, when you will realise its value."

As he said this, the stranger handed the ecclesiastic a small box of light weight; the priest took it involuntarily, so to speak, for the solemnity of the man's words, the

tone in which he said them, and the respect with which he handled the box, had surprised him beyond measure. They returned then to the room where the two nuns were awaiting them.

"You are," said the stranger, "in a house whose owner, Mucius Scævola, the plasterer who lives on the first floor, is famous throughout the section for his patriotism; but he is secretly attached to the Bourbons. He used to be a huntsman in the service of Monseigneur le Prince de Conti, and he owes his fortune to him. If you do not go out of his house, you are safer than in any place in France. Stay here. Devout hearts will attend to your necessities, and you may await without danger less evil times. A year hence, on the twenty-first of January (as he mentioned the date he could not restrain an involuntary gesture), if you continue to occupy this dismal apartment, I will return to celebrate again a mass of expiation."

He said no more. He bowed to the silent

occupants of the attic, cast a last glance upon the evidences of their poverty, and went away.

To the two innocent nuns, such an adventure had all the interest of a romance; and so, as soon as the venerable abbé informed them of the mysterious gift so solemnly bestowed upon him by that man, the box was placed upon the table and the three anxious faces, dimly lighted by the candle, betrayed an indescribable curiosity. Mademoiselle de Langeais opened the box, and found therein a handkerchief of finest linen, drenched with perspiration; and, on unfolding it, they saw stains.

"It is blood!" said the priest.

"It is marked with the royal crown!" cried the other nun.

The two sisters dropped the precious relic with a gesture of horror. To those two ingenuous souls the mystery in which the stranger was enveloped became altogether inexplicable; and as for the priest, from that day he did not even seek an explanation of it.

The three prisoners soon perceived that a powerful arm was stretched over them, in spite of the Terror.

In the first place, they received a supply of wood and provisions; then the two nuns realised that a woman must be associated with their protector, when some one sent them linen and clothing which enabled them to go out without being noticed by reason of the aristocratic cut of the garments which they had been forced to retain; and lastly, Mucius Scævola gave them two cards of citizenship. It often happened that information essential to the priest's safety reached him by devious ways; and he found this advice so opportune that it could have been given only by somebody initiated in state secrets.

Despite the famine which prevailed in Paris, the outcasts found at the door of their lodging rations of white bread, which was brought there regularly by invisible hands; they believed, however, that they could identify Mucius Scævola as the mysterious agent of this

beneficence, which was always as ingenious as it was timely. The noble occupants of the attic could not doubt that their protector was the person who had come to ask the priest to celebrate the mortuary mass on the evening of the twenty-second of January, 1793; so that he became the object of a peculiar sort of worship to those three beings, who had no hope except in him, and lived only through him. They had added special prayers for him to their daily devotions; night and morning those pious souls offered up entreaties for his happiness, for his prosperity, for his salvation, and prayed to God to rescue him from all snares, to deliver him from his enemies, and to grant him a long and peaceful life. Their gratitude, being renewed every day, so to speak, was necessarily accompanied by a feeling of curiosity which became more intense from day to day. The circumstances which had attended the appearance of the stranger were the subject of their conversation; they formed innumerable conjectures

about him, and the diversion which their preoccupation with him afforded them was a benefaction of a new sort. They were fully determined not to allow the stranger to evade their friendship when he should return, according to his promise, to commemorate the sad anniversary of the death of Louis XVI.

That night, so impatiently awaited, came at last. At midnight they heard the sound of the stranger's heavy steps on the old, wooden staircase; the room had been arrayed to receive him, the altar was in place. This time the sisters opened the door beforehand and went forth eagerly to light the staircase. Mademoiselle de Langeais even went down a few steps in order to see her benefactor the sooner.

"Come," she said to him in a tremulous and affectionate voice, "come, we are waiting for you."

The man raised his head, cast a gloomy glance upon the nun, and made no reply. She felt as if a garment of ice had fallen upon

her, and she said no more; at sight of him, gratitude and curiosity expired in all their hearts. He may have been less cold, less silent, less awe-inspiring than he appeared to those poor souls, whom the exaltation of their feeling inclined to an outpouring of friendliness. The three unhappy prisoners, understanding that he proposed to remain a stranger to them, resigned themselves to it. The priest fancied that he detected upon the stranger's lips a smile that was instantly repressed when he saw the preparations that had been made to receive him. He heard the mass and prayed; but he disappeared after responding by a few words of negative courtesy to Mademoiselle de Langeais's invitation to share the little supper they had prepared.

After the ninth of Thermidor the nuns were able to go about Paris without danger. The old priest's first errand was to a perfumer's shop, at the sign of *La Reine des Fleurs*, kept by Citizen and Citizeness Ragon, formerly perfumers to the Court, who had remained

true to the royal family, and of whose services the Vendeans availed themselves to correspond with the princes and the royalist committee in Paris. The abbé, dressed according to the style of the period, was standing on the door-step of that shop, between St.-Roch and Rue des Frondeurs, when a crowd which filled Rue St.-Honoré prevented him from going out.

"What is it?" he asked Madame Ragon.

"Oh! it 's nothing," she replied; "just the tumbril and the executioner, going to the Place Louis XV. Ah! we saw him very often last year; but to-day, four days after the anniversary of the twenty-first of January, we can look at that horrible procession without distress."

"Why so?" said the abbé; "what you say is not Christian."

"Why, it 's the execution of Robespierre's accomplices; they defended themselves as long as they could, but they 're going now themselves where they have sent so many innocent people."

The crowd passed like a flood. Abbé de Marolles, yielding to an impulse of curiosity, saw over the sea of heads, standing on the tumbril, the man who, three days before, had listened to his mass.

"Who is that," he said, "that man who ——"

"That is the headsman," replied Monsieur Ragon, giving the executioner his monarchical name.

"My dear, my dear," cried Madame Ragon, "monsieur l'abbé is fainting!"

And the old woman seized a phial of salts, in order to bring the old priest to himself.

"Doubtless," said the old priest, "he gave me the handkerchief with which the king wiped his brow when he went to his martyrdom! Poor man! That steel knife had a heart, when all France had none!"

The perfumers thought that the unfortunate priest was delirious.

1830.

La Grande Bretèche

La Grande Bretèche

ABOUT one hundred yards from Vendôme, on the banks of the Loire, there stands an old dark-coloured house, surmounted by a very high roof, and so completely isolated that there is not in the neighbourhood a single evil-smelling tannery or wretched inn, such as we see in the outskirts of almost every small town. In front of the house is a small garden bordering the river, in which the boxwood borders of the paths, once neatly trimmed, now grow at their pleasure. A few willows, born in the Loire, have grown as rapidly as the hedge which encloses the garden, and half conceal the house. The plants which we call weeds adorn the slope of the bank with their luxuriant vegetation. The fruit-trees, neglected for ten years, bear no fruit; their offshoots form a dense undergrowth. The espaliers resemble hornbeam hedges. The

paths, formerly gravelled, are overrun with purslane; but, to tell the truth, there are no well-marked paths.

From the top of the mountain upon which hang the ruins of the old château of the Dukes of Vendôme, the only spot from which the eye can look into this enclosure, you would say to yourself that, at a period which it is difficult to determine, that little nook was the delight of some gentleman devoted to roses and tulips, to horticulture in short, but especially fond of fine fruit. You espy an arbour, or rather the ruins of an arbour, beneath which a table still stands, not yet entirely consumed by time. At sight of that garden, which is no longer a garden, one may divine the negative delights of the peaceful life which provincials lead, as one divines the existence of a worthy tradesman by reading the epitaph on his tombstone. To round out the melancholy yet soothing thoughts which fill the mind, there is on one of the walls a sun-dial, embellished with this commonplace Christian

inscription: ULTIMAM COGITA. The roof of the house is terribly dilapidated, the blinds are always drawn, the balconies are covered with swallow's-nests, the doors are never opened. Tall weeds mark with green lines the cracks in the steps; the ironwork is covered with rust. Moon, sun, winter, summer, snow, have rotted the wood, warped the boards, and corroded the paint.

The deathly silence which reigns there is disturbed only by the birds, the cats, the martens, the rats and the mice, which are at liberty to run about, to fight, and to eat one another at their will. An invisible hand has written everywhere the word MYSTERY. If, impelled by curiosity, you should go to inspect the house on the street side, you would see a high gate arched at the top, in which the children of the neighbourhood have made numberless holes. I learned later that that gate had been condemned ten years before. Through these irregular breaches you would be able to observe the perfect harmony

between the garden front and the courtyard front. The same disorder reigns supreme in both. Tufts of weeds surround the pavements. Enormous cracks furrow the walls, whose blackened tops are enlaced by the countless tendrils of climbing plants. The steps are wrenched apart, the bell-rope is rotten, the gutters are broken. "What fire from heaven has passed this way? What tribunal has ordered salt to be strewn upon this dwelling? Has God been insulted here? Has France been betrayed?" Such are the questions which one asks one's self. The reptiles crawl hither and thither without answering. That empty and deserted house is an immense riddle, the solution of which is known to no one.

It was formerly a small feudal estate and bore the name of La Grande Bretèche. During my stay at Vendôme, where Desplein had left me to attend a rich patient, the aspect of that strange building became one of my keenest pleasures. Was it not more than a mere ruin? Some souvenirs of undeniable authen-

ticity are always connected with a ruin; but that abode, still standing, although in process of gradual demolition by an avenging hand, concealed a secret, an unknown thought; at the very least, it betrayed a caprice. More than once, in the evening, I wandered in the direction of the hedge, now wild and uncared for, which surrounded that enclosure. I defied scratches, and made my way into that ownerless garden, that estate which was neither public nor private; and I remained whole hours there contemplating its disarray. Not even to learn the story which would doubtless account for that extraordinary spectacle would I have asked a single question of any Vendômese gossip. Straying about there, I composed delightful romances, I abandoned myself to little orgies of melancholy which enchanted me.

If I had learned the cause of that perhaps most commonplace neglect, I should have lost the unspoken poesy with which I intoxicated myself. To me that spot represented

the most diverse images of human life darkened by its misfortunes; now it was the air of the cloister, minus the monks; again, the perfect peace of the cemetery, minus the dead speaking their epitaphic language; to-day, the house of the leper; to-morrow, that of the Fates; but it was, above all, the image of the province, with its meditation, with its hour-glass life. I have often wept there, but never laughed. More than once I have felt an involuntary terror, as I heard above my head the low rustling made by the wings of some hurrying dove. The ground is damp; you must beware of lizards, snakes, and toads, which wander about there with the fearless liberty of nature; above all, you must not fear the cold, for, after a few seconds, you feel an icy cloak resting upon your shoulders, like the hand of the Commendator on the neck of Don Juan. One evening I had shuddered there; the wind had twisted an old rusty weathervane, whose shrieks resembled a groan uttered by the house at the moment

that I was finishing a rather dismal melodrama, by which I sought to explain to myself that species of monumental grief. I returned to my inn, beset by sombre thoughts. When I had supped, my hostess entered my room with a mysterious air, and said to me:

"Here is Monsieur Regnault, monsieur."

"Who is Monsieur Regnault?"

"What! Monsieur does n't know Monsieur Regnault? That 's funny!" she said, as she left the room.

Suddenly I saw a tall, slender man, dressed in black, with his hat in his hand, who entered the room like a ram ready to rush at his rival, disclosing a retreating forehead, a small, pointed head, and a pale face, not unlike a glass of dirty water. You would have said that he was the doorkeeper of some minister. He wore an old coat, threadbare at the seams; but he had a diamond in his shirt-frill and gold rings in his ears.

"To whom have I the honour of speaking, monsieur?" I asked him.

He took a chair, seated himself in front of my fire, placed his hat on my table, and replied, rubbing his hands:

"Ah! it's very cold! I am Monsieur Regnault, monsieur."

I bowed, saying to myself:

"*Il Bondocani!* Look for him!"

"I am the notary at Vendôme," he continued.

"I am delighted to hear it, monsieur," I exclaimed, "but I am not ready to make my will, for reasons best known to myself."

"Just a minute," he rejoined, raising his hand as if to impose silence upon me. "I beg pardon, monsieur, I beg pardon! I have heard that you go to walk sometimes in the garden of La Grande Bretèche."

"Yes, monsieur!"

"Just a minute," he said, repeating his gesture; "that practice constitutes a downright trespass. I have come, monsieur, in the name and as executor of the late Madame Countess de Merret, to beg you to discontinue

your visits. Just a minute! I 'm not a Turk, and I don't propose to charge you with a crime. Besides, it may well be that you are not aware of the circumstances which compel me to allow the finest mansion in Vendôme to fall to ruin. However, monsieur, you seem to be a man of education, and you must know that the law forbids entrance upon an enclosed estate under severe penalties. A hedge is as good as a wall. But the present condition of the house may serve as an excuse for your curiosity. I would ask nothing better than to allow you to go and come as you please in that house; but, as it is my duty to carry out the will of the testatrix, I have the honour, monsieur, to request you not to go into that garden again. Even I myself, monsieur, since the opening of the will, have never set foot inside that house, which, as I have had the honour to tell you, is a part of the estate of Madame de Merret. We simply reported the number of doors and windows, in order to fix the amount of the impost which I pay

annually from the fund set aside for that purpose by the late countess. Ah! her will made a great deal of talk in Vendôme, monsieur."

At that, he stopped to blow his nose, the excellent man. I respected his loquacity, understanding perfectly that the administration of Madame de Merret's property was the important event of his life — his reputation, his glory, his Restoration. I must needs bid adieu to my pleasant reveries, to my romances; so that I was not inclined to scorn the pleasure of learning the truth from an official source.

"Would it be indiscreet, monsieur," I asked him, "to ask you the reason of this extraordinary state of affairs?"

At that question an expression which betrayed all the pleasure that a man feels who is accustomed to ride a hobby passed over the notary's face. He pulled up his shirt collar with a self-satisfied air, produced his snuffbox, opened it, offered it to me, and at my refusal, took a famous pinch himself. He was happy; the man who has no hobby has no

idea of the satisfaction that can be derived from life. A hobby is the precise mean between passion and monomania. At that moment I understood the witty expression of Sterne in all its extent, and I had a perfect conception of the joy with which Uncle Toby, with Trim's assistance, bestrode his battle-horse.

"Monsieur," said Monsieur Regnault, "I was chief clerk to Master Roguin of Paris. An excellent office, of which you may have heard? No? Why, it was made famous by a disastrous failure. Not having sufficient money to practise in Paris, at the price to which offices had risen in 1816, I came here and bought the office of my predecessor. I had relatives in Vendôme, among others a very rich aunt, who gave me her daughter in marriage. Monsieur," he continued after a brief pause, "three months after being licensed by the Keeper of the Seals I was sent for one evening, just as I was going to bed (I was not then married), by Madame Countess de Merret, to come to her Château de Merret.

Her maid, an excellent girl who works in this inn to-day, was at my door with madame countess's carriage. But, just a minute! I must tell you, monsieur, that Monsieur Count de Merret had gone to Paris to die, two months before I came here. He died miserably there, abandoning himself to excesses of all sorts. You understand?—On the day of his departure madame countess had left La Grande Bretèche and had dismantled it. Indeed, some people declare that she burned the furniture and hangings, and all chattels whatsoever now contained in the estate leased by the said — What on earth am I saying? I beg pardon, I thought I was dictating a lease. — That she burned them," he continued, "in the fields at Merret. Have you been to Merret, monsieur? No?" he said, answering his own question. "Ah! that is a lovely spot! for about three months," he continued, after a slight shake of the head, "monsieur count and madame countess led a strange life.

"They received no guests; madame lived on the ground floor, and monsieur on the first floor. When madame countess was left alone, she never appeared except at church. Later, in her own house, at her château, she refused to see the friends who came to see her. She was already much changed when she left La Grande Bretèche to go to Merret. The dear woman — I say 'dear,' because this diamond came from her; but I actually only saw her once,— the excellent lady, then, was very ill; she had doubtless despaired of her health, for she died without calling a doctor; so that many of our ladies thought that she was not in full possession of her wits. My curiosity was therefore strangely aroused, monsieur, when I learned that Madame de Merret needed my services. I was not the only one who took an interest in that story. That same evening, although it was late, the whole town knew that I had gone to Merret. The maid answered rather vaguely the questions that I asked her on the road; she told me, however, that her

mistress had received the sacrament from the curé of Merret during the day, and that she did not seem likely to live through the night.

"I reached the château about eleven o'clock; I mounted the main staircase. After passing through divers large rooms, high and dark, and as cold and damp as the devil, I reached the state bedchamber where the countess was. According to the reports that were current concerning that lady — I should never end, monsieur, if I should repeat all the stories that are told about her — I had thought of her as a coquette. But, if you please, I had much difficulty in finding her in the huge bed in which she lay. To be sure, to light that enormous wainscoted chamber of the old *régime,* where everything was so covered with dust that it made one sneeze simply to look at it, she had only one of those old-fashioned Argand lamps. Ah! but you have never been to Merret. Well, monsieur, the bed is one of those beds of the olden time, with a high canopy of flowered material. A small night-table stood

beside the bed, and I saw upon it a copy of the *Imitation of Jesus Christ,* which, by the by, I bought for my wife, as well as the lamp. There was also a large couch for the attendant, and two chairs. Not a spark of fire. That was all the furniture. It would n't have filled ten lines in an inventory.

"Oh! my dear monsieur, if you had seen, as I then saw it, that huge room hung with dark tapestry, you would have imagined yourself transported into a genuine scene from a novel. It was icy cold; and, more than that, absolutely funereal," he added, raising his arm with a theatrical gesture, and pausing for a moment. "By looking hard and walking close to the bed, I succeeded in discovering Madame de Merret, thanks to the lamp, the light of which shone upon the pillow. Her face was as yellow as wax, and resembled two clasped hands. She wore a lace cap, which revealed her lovely hair, as white as snow. She was sitting up, and seemed to retain that position with much difficulty. Her great black eyes,

dulled by fever no doubt, and already almost lifeless, hardly moved beneath the bones which the eyebrows cover—these," he said, pointing to the arch over his eyes.—"Her brow was moist. Her fleshless hands resembled bones covered with tightly-drawn skin; her veins and muscles could be seen perfectly. She must have been very beautiful; but at that moment I was seized with an indefinable feeling at her aspect. Never before, according to those who laid her out, had a living creature attained such thinness without dying. In short, she was horrible to look at; disease had so wasted that woman that she was nothing more than a phantom. Her pale violet lips seemed not to move when she spoke to me. Although my profession had familiarised me with such spectacles, by taking me sometimes to the pillows of dying persons to take down their last wishes, I confess that the families in tears and despair whom I had seen were as nothing beside that solitary, silent woman in that enormous château.

"I did not hear the slightest sound, I could not detect the movement which the breathing of the sick woman should have imparted to the sheets that covered her; and I stood quite still, gazing at her in a sort of stupor. It seems to me that I am there now. At last her great eyes moved, she tried to raise her right hand, which fell back upon the bed, and these words came from her mouth like a breath, for her voice had already ceased to be a voice: 'I have been awaiting you with much impatience.'—Her cheeks suddenly flushed. It was a great effort for her to speak, monsieur.—'Madame,' I said. She motioned to me to be silent. At that moment the old nurse rose and whispered in my ear: 'Don't speak; madame countess cannot bear to hear the slightest sound, and what you said might excite her.'—I sat down. A few moments later, Madame de Merret collected all her remaining strength, to move her right arm and thrust it, not without infinite difficulty, beneath her bolster; she paused for just a

moment; then she made a last effort to withdraw her hand, and when she finally produced a sealed paper, drops of sweat fell from her brow.—'I place my will in your hands,' she said. 'O *mon Dieu,* oh!' That was all. She grasped a crucifix that lay on her bed, hastily put it to her lips, and died. The expression of her staring eyes makes me shudder even now, when I think of it. She must have suffered terribly! There was a gleam of joy in her last glance, a sentiment which remained in her dead eyes.

"I carried the will away; and when it was opened, I found that Madame de Merret had appointed me her executor. She left all her property to the hospital at Vendôme with the exception of a few individual legacies. But these were her provisions with respect to La Grande Bretèche: She directed me to leave her house, for fifty years from the day of her death, in the same condition as at the moment that she died; forbidding any person whatsoever to enter the rooms, forbidding the slight-

est repairs to be made, and even setting aside a sum in order to hire keepers, if it should be found necessary, to assure the literal execution of her purpose. At the expiration of that period, if the desire of the testatrix has been carried out, the house is to belong to my heirs, for monsieur knows that notaries cannot accept legacies. If not, La Grande Bretèche is to revert to whoever is entitled to it, but with the obligation to comply with the conditions set forth in a codicil attached to the will, which is not to be opened until the expiration of the said fifty years. The will was not attacked; and so——"

At that, without finishing his sentence, the elongated notary glanced at me with a triumphant air, and I made him altogether happy by addressing a few compliments to him.

"Monsieur," I said, "you have made a profound impression upon me, so that I think I see that dying woman, paler than her sheets; her gleaming eyes terrify me; and I shall dream of her to-night. But you must have

formed some conjecture concerning the provisions of that extraordinary will."

"Monsieur," he said with a comical reserve, "I never allow myself to judge the conduct of those persons who honour me by giving me a diamond."

I soon loosened the tongue of the scrupulous Vendômese notary, who communicated to me, not without long digressions, observations due to the profound politicians of both sexes whose decrees are law in Vendôme. But those observations were so contradictory and so diffuse that I almost fell asleep, despite the interest I took in that authentic narrative. The dull and monotonous tone of the notary, who was accustomed, no doubt, to listen to himself, and to force his clients and his fellow citizens to listen to him, triumphed over my curiosity.

"Aha! many people, monsieur," he said to me on the landing, "would like to live forty-five years more; but just a minute!" and with a sly expression he placed his right fore-

finger on his nose, as if he would have said: "Just mark what I say."—"But to do that, to do that," he added, "a man must be less than sixty."

I closed my door, having been roused from my apathy by this last shaft, which the notary considered very clever; then I seated myself in my easy-chair, placing my feet on the andirons. I was soon absorbed in an imaginary romance *à la* Radcliffe, based upon the judicial observations of Monsieur Regnault, when my door, under the skillful manipulation of a woman's hand, turned upon its hinges. My hostess appeared, a stout, red-faced woman, of excellent disposition, who had missed her vocation; she was a Fleming, who should have been born in a picture by Teniers.

"Well, monsieur," she said, "no doubt Monsieur Regnault has given you his story of La Grande Bretèche?"

"Yes, Mother Lepas."

"What did he tell you?"

I repeated in a few words the chilling and

gloomy story of Madame de Merret. At each sentence my hostess thrust out her neck, gazing at me with the true innkeeper's perspicacity — a sort of happy medium between the instinct of the detective, the cunning of the spy, and the craft of the trader.

"My dear Madame Lepas," I added, as I concluded, "you evidently know more, eh? If not, why should you have come up here?"

"Oh! on an honest woman's word, as true as my name 's Lepas ——"

"Don't swear; your eyes are big with a secret. You knew Monsieur de Merret. What sort of a man was he?"

"Bless my soul! Monsieur de Merret was a fine man, whom you never could see the whole of, he was so long; an excellent gentleman, who came here from Picardy, and who had his brains very near his cap, as we say here. He paid cash for everything, in order not to have trouble with anybody. You see, he was lively. We women all found him very agreeable."

"Because he was lively?" I asked.

"That may be," she said. "You know, monsieur, that a man must have had something in front of him, as they say, to marry Madame de Merret, who, without saying anything against the others, was the loveliest and richest woman in the whole province. She had about twenty thousand francs a year. The whole town went to her wedding. The bride was dainty and attractive, a real jewel of a woman. Ah! they made a handsome couple at that time!"

"Did they live happily together?"

"Oh dear! oh dear! yes and no, so far as any one could tell; for, as you can imagine, we folks did n't live on intimate terms with them. Madame de Merret was a kind-hearted woman, very pleasant, who had to suffer sometimes perhaps from her husband's quick temper; but although he was a bit proud, we liked him. You see, it was his business to be like that; when a man is noble, you know——"

"However, some catastrophe must have

happened, to make Monsieur and Madame de Merret separate so violently?"

"I did n't say there was any catastrophe, monsieur. I don't know anything about it."

"Good! I am sure now that you know all about it."

"Well, monsieur, I 'll tell you all I know. When I saw Monsieur Regnault come up to your room, I had an idea that he would talk to you about Madame de Merret in connection with La Grande Bretèche. That gave me the idea of consulting with monsieur, who seems to me a man of good judgment and incapable of playing false with a poor woman like me, who never did anybody any harm, and yet who 's troubled by her conscience. Up to this time I 've never dared to speak out to the people of this neighbourhood, for they 're all sharp-tongued gossips. And then, monsieur, I 've never had a guest stay in my inn so long as you have, and to whom I could tell the story of the fifteen thousand francs."

"My dear Madame Lepas," I said, arresting the flood of her words, "if your confidence is likely to compromise me, I would n't be burdened with it for a moment, for anything in the world."

"Don't be afraid," she said, interrupting me; "you shall see."

This eagerness on her part made me think that I was not the only one to whom my worthy hostess had communicated the secret, of which I dreaded to be the only confidant, and I listened.

"Monsieur," she began, "when the Emperor sent Spanish or other prisoners of war here, I had to board, at the expense of the government, a young Spaniard who was sent to Vendôme on parole. In spite of the parole, he went every day to show himself to the subprefect. He was a Spanish grandee! Nothing less! He had a name in *os* and *dia,* something like Bagos de Férédia. I have his name written on my register; you can read it if you wish. He was a fine young

man for a Spaniard, who they say are all ugly. He was only five feet two or three inches tall, but he was well-built; he had little hands, which he took care of—oh! you should have seen; he had as many brushes for his hands as a woman has for all purposes! He had long, black hair, a flashing eye, and rather a copper-coloured skin, which I liked all the same. He wore such fine linen as I never saw before on any one, although I have entertained princesses, and among others General Bertrand, the Duke and Duchess d'Abrantès, Monsieur Decazes, and the King of Spain. He did n't eat much; but he had polite and pleasant manners, so that I could n't be angry with him for it. Oh! I was very fond of him, although he did n't say four words a day, and it was impossible to have the slightest conversation with him; if any one spoke to him, he would n't answer; it was a fad, a mania that they all have, so they tell me. He read his breviary like a priest, he went to mass and to all the services regu-

larly. Where did he sit? We noticed that later: about two steps from Madame de Merret's private chapel. As he took his seat there the first time that he came to the church, nobody imagined that there was any design in it. Besides, he never took his face off his prayer-book, the poor young man! In the evening, monsieur, he used to walk on the mountain, among the ruins of the château. That was the poor man's only amusement; he was reminded of his own country there. They say that there 's nothing but mountains in Spain.

"Very soon after he came here he began to stay out late. I was anxious when he did n't come home till midnight; but we all got used to his whim; he would take the key of the door, and we would n't wait for him. He lived in a house that we have on Rue de Casernes. Then one of our stablemen told us that one night, when he took the horses to drink, he thought he saw the Spanish grandee swimming far out in the river, like a real fish.

When he came back, I told him to be careful of the eel-grass; he seemed vexed that he had been seen in the water. At last, monsieur, one day, or rather one morning, we did n't find him in his room; he had n't come home. By hunting carefully everywhere, I found a writing in his table drawer, where there were fifty of the Spanish gold-pieces which they call *portugaises,* and which were worth about five thousand francs; and then there was ten thousand francs' worth of diamonds in a little sealed box. His writing said that in case he did n't return, he left us this money and his diamonds, on condition that we would found masses to thank God for his escape and his salvation. In those days I still had my man, who went out to look for him. And here 's the funny part of the story: he brought back the Spaniard's clothes, which he found under a big stone in a sort of shed by the river, on the château side, almost opposite La Grande Bretèche.

My husband went there so early that no

one saw him; he burned the clothes after reading the letter, and we declared, according to Count Férédia's wish, that he had escaped. The subprefect set all the gendarmerie on his track, but, bless my soul! they never caught him. Lepas believed that the Spaniard had drowned himself. For my part, monsieur, I don't think it; I think rather that he was mixed up in Madame de Merret's business, seeing that Rosalie told me that the crucifix that her mistress thought so much of that she had it buried with her was made of ebony and silver; now, in the early part of his stay here, Monsieur Férédia had one of silver and ebony, which I did n't see afterwards.—Tell me now, monsieur, is n't it true that I need n't have any remorse about the Spaniard's fifteen thousand francs, and that they are fairly mine?"

"Certainly. But did you never try to question Rosalie?" I asked her.

"Oh! yes, indeed, monsieur. But would you believe it? That girl is like a wall. She

knows something, but it's impossible to make her talk."

After conversing a moment more with me, my hostess left me beset by undefined and dismal thoughts, by a romantic sort of curiosity, a religious terror not unlike the intense emotion that seizes us when we enter a dark church at night and see a dim light in the distance under the lofty arches; a vague figure gliding along, or the rustling of a dress or a surplice; it makes us shudder. La Grande Bretèche and its tall weeds, its condemned windows, its rusty ironwork, its closed doors, its deserted rooms, suddenly appeared before me in fantastic guise. I tried to penetrate that mysterious abode, seeking there the kernel of that sombre story, of that drama which had caused the death of three persons. In my eyes Rosalie was the most interesting person in Vendôme. As I scrutinised her, I detected traces of some inmost thought, despite the robust health that shone upon her plump cheeks. There was in her some seed

of remorse or of hope; her manner announced a secret, as does that of the devotee who prays with excessive fervour, or that of the infanticide, who constantly hears her child's last cry. However, her attitude was artless and natural, her stupid smile had no trace of criminality, and you would have voted her innocent simply by glancing at the large handkerchief with red and blue squares which covered her vigorous bust, confined by a gown with white and violet stripes.

"No," I thought, "I won't leave Vendôme without learning the whole story of La Grande Bretèche. To obtain my end, I will become Rosalie's friend, if it is absolutely necessary."

"Rosalie?" I said one evening.

"What is it, monsieur?"

"You are not married?"

She started slightly.

Oh! I sha' n't lack men when I take a fancy to be unhappy!" she said with a laugh.

She speedily overcame her inward emotion; for all women, from the great lady down to

the servant at an inn, have a self-possession which is peculiar to them.

"You are fresh and appetising enough not to lack suitors. But tell me, Rosalie, why did you go to work in an inn when you left Madame de Merret's? Did n't she leave you some money?"

"Oh yes! but my place is the best in Vendôme, monsieur."

This reply was one of those which judges and lawyers call dilatory. Rosalie seemed to me to occupy in that romantic story the position of the square in the middle of the chess-board; she was at the very centre of interest and of truth; she seemed to me to be tied up in the clew; it was no longer an ordinary case of attempting seduction; there was in that girl the last chapter of a romance; and so, from that moment, Rosalie became the object of my attentions. By dint of studying the girl, I observed in her, as in all women to whom we devote all our thoughts, a multitude of good qualities: she was neat and clean, and

she was fine-looking—that goes without saying; she had also all the attractions which our desire imparts to women, in whatever station of life they may be. A fortnight after the notary's visit, I said to Rosalie one evening, or rather one morning, for it was very early:

"Tell me all that you know about Madame de Merret."

"Oh, don't ask me that, Monsieur Horace!" she replied in alarm.

Her pretty face darkened, her bright colour vanished, and her eyes lost their humid, innocent light. But I insisted.

"Well," she rejoined, "as you insist upon it, I will tell you; but keep my secret!"

"Of course, of course, my dear girl; I will keep all your secrets with the probity of a thief, and that is the most loyal probity that exists."

"If it's all the same to you," she said, "I prefer that it should be with your own."

Thereupon she arranged her neckerchief, and assumed the attitude of a story-teller; for

there certainly is an attitude of trust and security essential to the telling of a story. The best stories are told at a certain hour, and at the table, as we all are now. No one ever told a story well while standing, or fasting. But if it were necessary to reproduce faithfully Rosalie's diffuse eloquence, a whole volume would hardly suffice. Now, as the event of which she gave me a confused account occupied, between the loquacity of the notary and that of Madame Lepas, the exact position of the mean terms of an arithmetical proportion between the two extremes, it is only necessary for me to repeat it to you in a few words. Therefore I abridge.

The room which Madame de Merret occupied at La Grande Bretèche was on the ground floor. A small closet, about four feet deep, in the wall, served as her wardrobe. Three months before the evening, the incidents of which I am about to narrate, Madame de Merret had been so seriously indisposed that her husband left her alone in her room and

slept in a room on the first floor. By one of those chances which it is impossible to foresee, he returned home, on the evening in question, two hours later than usual, from the club to which he was accustomed to go to read the newspapers and to talk politics with the people of the neighbourhood. His wife supposed that he had come home, and had gone to bed and to sleep. But the invasion of France had given rise to a lively discussion; the game of billiards had been very close, and he had lost forty francs, an enormous sum at Vendôme, where everybody hoards money, and where manners are confined within the limits of a modesty worthy of all praise, which perhaps is the source of a true happiness of which no Parisian has a suspicion.

For some time past, Monsieur de Merret had contented himself with asking Rosalie if his wife were in bed; at the girl's reply, always in the affirmative, he went immediately to his own room with the readiness born of habit and confidence. But on returning home that evening,

he took it into his head to go to Madame de Merret's room, to tell her of his misadventure and perhaps also to console himself for it. During dinner he had remarked that Madame de Merret was very coquettishly dressed; he said to himself, as he walked home from the club, that his wife was no longer ill, that her convalescence had improved her; but he perceived it, as husbands notice everything, a little late. Instead of calling Rosalie, who at that moment was busy in the kitchen, watching the cook and the coachman play a difficult hand of *brisque*, Monsieur de Merret went to his wife's room, lighted by his lantern, which he had placed on the top step of the stairs. His footstep, easily recognised, resounded under the arches of the corridor. At the instant that he turned the knob of his wife's door, he fancied that he heard the door of the closet that I have mentioned close; but when he entered, Madame de Merret was alone, standing in front of the hearth. The husband naïvely concluded that Rosalie was in the closet;

however, a suspicion, that rang in his ears like the striking of a clock, made him distrustful; he looked at his wife and detected in her eyes something indefinable of confusion and dismay.

"You come home very late," she said.

That voice, usually so pure and so gracious, seemed to him slightly changed. He made no reply, but at that moment Rosalie entered the room. That was a thunderclap to him. He walked about the room, from one window to another, with a uniform step and with folded arms.

"Have you learned anything distressing, or are you ill?" his wife timidly asked him, while Rosalie undressed her.

He made no reply.

"You may go," said Madame de Merret to her maid; "I will put on my curl-papers myself."

She divined some catastrophe simply from the expression of her husband's face, and she preferred to be alone with him. When Rosalie was gone, or was supposed to be gone,

for she stayed for some moments in the corridor, Monsieur de Merret took his stand in front of his wife, and said to her coldly:

"Madame, there is some one in your closet?"

She looked at her husband calmly, and replied simply:

"No, monsieur."

That "no" tore Monsieur de Merret's heart, for he did not believe it; and yet his wife had never seemed to him purer and more holy than she seemed at that moment. He rose to open the closet door; Madame de Merret took his hand, stopped him, looked at him with a melancholy expression, and said in a voice strangely moved:

"If you find no one, reflect that all is at an end between us!"

The indescribable dignity of his wife's attitude reawoke the gentleman's profound esteem for her, and inspired in him one of those resolutions which require only a vaster theatre in order to become immortal.

"No," he said, "I will not do it, Josephine. In either case, we should be separated forever. Listen; I know all the purity of your soul, and I know that you lead the life of a saint, and that you would not commit a mortal sin to save your life."

At these words, Madame de Merret looked at her husband with a haggard eye.

"See, here is your crucifix; swear to me before God that there is no one there, and I will believe you; I will never open that door."

Madame de Merret took the crucifix and said:

"I swear it."

"Louder," said the husband, "and repeat after me: 'I swear before God that there is no one in that closet.'"

She repeated the words without confusion.

"It is well," said Monsieur de Merret, coldly. After a moment's silence: "This is a very beautiful thing that I did not know you possessed," he said, as he examined the crucifix

of ebony encrusted with silver and beautifully carved.

"I found it at Duvivier's; when that party of prisoners passed through Vendôme last year, he bought it of a Spanish monk."

"Ah!" said Monsieur de Merret, replacing the crucifix on the nail. And he rang. Rosalie did not keep him waiting. Monsieur de Merret walked hastily to meet her, led her into the embrasure of the window looking over the garden, and said to her in a low voice:

"I know that Gorenflot wants to marry you, that poverty alone prevents you from coming together, and that you have told him that you would not be his wife until he found some way to become a master mason. Well, go to him, and tell him to come here with his trowel and his tools. Manage so as not to wake anybody in his house but him; his fortune will exceed your desires. Above all, go out of this house without chattering, or——"

He frowned. Rosalie started, and he called her back.

"Here, take my pass-key," he said.

"Jean!" shouted Monsieur de Merret in the corridor, in a voice of thunder.

Jean, who was both his coachman and his confidential man, left his game of *brisque* and answered the summons.

"Go to bed, all of you," said his master, motioning to him to come near. And he added, but in an undertone: "When they are all asleep, *asleep*, do you understand, you will come down and let me know."

Monsieur de Merret, who had not lost sight of his wife while giving his orders, calmly returned to her side in front of the fire, and began to tell her about the game of billiards and the discussion at the club. When Rosalie returned, she found monsieur and madame talking most amicably. The gentleman had recently had plastered all the rooms which composed his reception-apartment on the ground floor. Plaster is very scarce in

Vendôme, and the cost of transportation increases the price materially; so he had purchased quite a large quantity, knowing that he would readily find customers for any that he might have left. The circumstance suggested the design which he proceeded to carry out.

"Gorenflot is here, monsieur," said Rosalie in an undertone.

"Let him come in," replied the Picard gentleman aloud.

Madame de Merret turned pale when she saw the mason.

"Gorenflot," said her husband, "go out to the carriage-house and get some bricks, and bring in enough to wall up the door of this closet; you can use the plaster that I had left, to plaster the wall." Then, beckoning Rosalie and the workman to him, he said in a low tone: "Look you, Gorenflot, you will sleep here to-night. But to-morrow morning you shall have a passport to go abroad, to a city which I will name to you. I will give you six thousand francs for your journey.

You will remain ten years in that city; if you are not satisfied there, you can settle in another city, provided that it is in the same country. You will go by way of Paris, where you will wait for me. There I will give you a guarantee to pay you six thousand francs more on your return, in case you have abided by the conditions of our bargain. At that price you should be willing to keep silent concerning what you have done here to-night. As for you, Rosalie, I will give you ten thousand francs, which will be paid to you on the day of your wedding, provided that you marry Gorenflot; but, in order to be married, you will have to be silent; if not, no dower."

"Rosalie," said Madame de Merret, "come here and arrange my hair.

The husband walked tranquilly back and forth, watching the door, the mason, and his wife, but without any outward sign of injurious suspicion. Gorenflot was obliged to make a noise; Madame de Merret seized an opportunity, when the workman was dropping

some bricks, and when her husband was at the other end of the room, to say to Rosalie:

"A thousand francs a year to you, my dear child, if you can tell Gorenflot to leave a crack at the bottom.—Go and help him," she said coolly, aloud.

Monsieur and Madame de Merret said not a word while Gorenflot was walling up the door. That silence was the result of design on the husband's part, for he did not choose to allow his wife a pretext for uttering words of double meaning; and on Madame de Merret's part, it was either prudence or pride. When the wall was half built, the crafty mason seized a moment when the gentleman's back was turned, to strike his pickaxe through one of the panes of the glass door. That act gave Madame de Merret to understand that Rosalie had spoken to Gorenflot. At that moment all three saw a man's face, dark and sombre, with black hair and fiery eyes. Before her husband had turned, the poor woman

had time to make a motion of her head to the stranger, to whom that signal meant, "Hope!"

At four o'clock, about daybreak, for it was September, the work was finished. The mason remained in the house under the eye of Jean, and Monsieur de Merret slept in his wife's chamber. In the morning, on rising, he said carelessly:

"Ah! by the way, I must go to the mayor's office for the passport."

He put his hat on his head, walked towards the door, turned back and took the crucifix. His wife fairly trembled with joy.

"He will go to Duvivier's," she thought.

As soon as the gentleman had left the room, Madame de Merret rang for Rosalie; then in a terrible voice she cried:

"The pickaxe! the pickaxe! and to work! I saw how Gorenflot understood last night; we shall have time to make a hole, and stop it up."

In a twinkling Rosalie brought her mistress

a sort of small axe, and she, with an ardour which no words can describe, began to demolish the wall. She had already loosened several bricks, when, as she stepped back to deal a blow even harder than the preceding ones, she saw Monsieur de Merret behind her; she fainted.

"Put madame on her bed," said the gentleman, coldly.

Anticipating what was likely to happen during his absence, he had laid a trap for his wife; he had simply written to the mayor, and had sent a messenger to Duvivier. The jeweller arrived just as the disorder in the room had been repaired.

"Duvivier," asked Monsieur de Merret, "did n't you buy some crucifixes from the Spaniards who passed through here?"

"No, monsieur."

"Very well; I thank you," he said, exchanging with his wife a tigerlike glance.—"Jean," he added, turning towards his confidential servant, "you will have my meals

served in Madame de Merret's room; she is ill, and I shall not leave her until she is well again."

The cruel man remained with his wife twenty days. During the first days, when there was a noise in the walled-up closet and Josephine attempted to implore him in behalf of the dying unknown, he replied, not allowing her to utter a word:

"You have sworn on the cross that there was no one there."

1832.

The Conscript

TO MY DEAR FRIEND, ALBERT MARCHAND DE LA RIBELLERIE, TOURS, 1836.

The Conscript

"Sometimes they saw him, by a phenomenon of vision or of locomotion, abolish space in its two elements of time and distance, one of which is intellectual and the other physical."—*Intellectual History of Louis Lambert.*

ON a certain evening in the month of November, 1793, the principal people of Carentan were gathered in the salon of Madame de Dey, at whose house the assembly was held daily. Some circumstances which would not have attracted attention in a large city, but which were certain to cause a flutter in a small one, lent to this customary meeting an unusual degree of interest. Two days before, Madame de Dey had closed her door to her guests, whom she had also excused herself from receiving on the preceding day, on the pretext of an indisposition. In ordinary times, these two occurrences would have produced the same effect in Carentan

that the closing of all the theatres would produce in Paris. In those days existence was to a certain extent incomplete. And in 1793 the conduct of Madame de Dey might have had the most deplorable results. The slightest venturesome proceeding almost always became a question of life or death for the nobles of that period. In order to understand the intense curiosity and the narrow-minded cunning which enlivened the Norman countenances of all those people during the evening, but especially in order that we may share the secret anxiety of Madame de Dey, it is necessary to explain the rôle that she played at Carentan. As the critical position in which she found herself at that moment was undoubtedly identical with that of many people during the Revolution, the sympathies of more than one reader will give the needed touch of colour to this narrative.

Madame de Dey, the widow of a lieutenant-general and chevalier of the Orders, had left the court at the beginning of the emigration.

As she possessed considerable property in the neighbourhood of Carentan, she had taken refuge there, hoping that the influence of the Terror would not be much felt so far from Paris. This prevision, based upon exact knowledge of the province, proved to be just. The Revolution did little devastation in Lower Normandy. Although, when Madame de Dey visited her estates formerly, she used to see only the noble families of the province, she had from policy thrown her house open to the leading *bourgeois* of the town, and to the new authorities, striving to make them proud of their conquest of her, without arousing either hatred or jealousy in their minds. Gracious and amiable, endowed with that indescribable gentleness of manner which attracts without resort to self-abasement or to entreaties, she had succeeded in winning general esteem by the most exquisite tact, the wise promptings of which had enabled her to maintain her stand on the narrow line where she could satisfy the demands of that mixed society, without

humiliating the self-esteem of the parvenus or offending that of her former friends.

About thirty-eight years of age, she still retained, not that fresh and buxom beauty which distinguishes the young women of Lower Normandy, but a slender, and, so to speak, aristocratic beauty. Her features were small and refined, her figure slender and willowy. When she spoke, her pale face would seem to brighten and to take on life. Her great black eyes were full of suavity, but their placid and devout expression seemed to indicate that the active principle of her existence had ceased to be. Married in the flower of her youth to an old and jealous soldier, the falseness of her position in the centre of a dissipated court contributed much, no doubt, to cast a veil of serious melancholy over a face on which the charm and vivacity of love must formerly have shone bright. Constantly obliged to restrain the ingenuous impulses, the emotions of a woman, at a time when she still feels instead of reflecting, passion had re-

mained unsullied in the depths of her heart. So it was that her principal attraction was due to the youthful simplicity which at intervals her face betrayed, and which gave to her ideas a naïve expression of desire. Her aspect imposed respect, but there were always in her bearing and in her voice symptoms of an outreaching towards an unknown future, as in a young girl; the most unsusceptible man soon found himself falling in love with her, and nevertheless retained a sort of respectful dread, inspired by her courteous manners, which were most imposing. Her soul, naturally great, and strengthened by painful struggles, seemed to be too far removed from the common herd, and men realised their limitations.

That soul necessarily demanded an exalted passion. So that Madame de Dey's affections were concentrated in a single sentiment, the sentiment of maternity. The happiness and pleasures of which her married life had been deprived, she found in her excessive love for

her son. She loved him not only with the pure and profound devotion of a mother, but with the coquetry of a mistress, the jealousy of a wife. She was unhappy when separated from him, anxious during his absence, could never see enough of him, lived only in him and for him. In order to make men understand the strength of this feeling, it will suffice to add that this son was not only Madame de Dey's only child, but her last remaining relative, the only living being to whom she could attach the fears, the hopes, and the joys of her life. The late Count de Dey was the last scion of his family, as she was the last heiress of hers. Thus human schemes and interests were in accord with the noblest cravings of the soul to intensify in the countess's heart a sentiment which is always strong in women. She had brought up her son only with infinite difficulty, which had made him dearer than ever to her; twenty times the doctors prophesied his death; but, trusting in her presentiments and her hopes, she had the inexpressible

joy of seeing him pass through the dangers of childhood unscathed, and of exulting in the upbuilding of his constitution in spite of the decrees of the faculty.

Thanks to constant care, her son had grown and had attained such perfect development, that at twenty years of age he was considered one of the most accomplished cavaliers at Versailles. Lastly—a piece of good fortune which does not crown the efforts of all mothers—she was adored by her son; their hearts were bound together by sympathies that were fraternal. Even if they had not been connected by the decree of nature, they would have felt instinctively for each other that affection of one being for another so rarely met with in life. Appointed sublieutenant of dragoons at eighteen, the young man had complied with the prevailing ideas of the requirements of honour at that period, by following the princes when they emigrated.

Thus Madame de Dey, of noble birth, wealthy, and the mother of an émigré, was

fully alive to the dangers of her painful situation. As she had no other aim than to preserve a great fortune for her son, she had renounced the happiness of accompanying him; but, when she read the harsh laws by virtue of which the Republic daily confiscated the property of the émigrés at Carentan, she applauded herself for her courageous act. Was she not guarding her son's treasures at the peril of her life? Then, when she learned of the shocking executions ordered by the Convention, she slept undisturbed, happy to know that her only treasure was in safety, far from all perils and all scaffolds. She took pleasure in the belief that she had adopted the best course to save all his fortunes at once. Making the concessions to this secret thought which the disasters of the time demanded, without compromising her womanly dignity or her aristocratic beliefs, she enveloped her sorrows in impenetrable mystery. She had realised the difficulties which awaited her at Carentan. To go thither and assume the first

place in society — was it not equivalent to defying the scaffold every day? But, sustained by a mother's courage, she succeeded in winning the affection of the poor by relieving all sorts of misery indiscriminately, and made herself necessary to the rich by taking the lead in their pleasures.

She received the prosecuting attorney of the commune, the mayor, the president of the district, the public accuser, and even the judges of the Revolutionary Tribunal. The first four of these functionaries, being unmarried, paid court to her, in the hope of marrying her, whether by terrifying her by the injury which they had it in their power to do her, or by offering her their protection. The public accuser, formerly an attorney at Caen, where he had been employed by the countess, tried to win her love by conduct full of devotion and generosity. A dangerous scheme! He was the most formidable of all the suitors. He alone was thoroughly acquainted with the condition of his former client's large fortune.

His passion was inevitably intensified by all the cravings of an avarice which rested upon almost unlimited power, upon the right of life or death throughout the district. This man, who was still young, displayed so much nobility in his behaviour that Madame de Dey had been unable as yet to make up her mind concerning him. But, scorning the danger that lay in a contest of wits with Normans, she employed the inventive genius and the cunning which nature has allotted to woman, to play those rivals against one another. By gaining time, she hoped to arrive safe and sound at the end of her troubles. At that time, the royalists in the interior of France flattered themselves that each day would see the close of the Revolution; and that conviction was the ruin of a great many of them.

Despite these obstacles, the countess had skillfully maintained her independence down to the day when, with incomprehensible imprudence, she had conceived the idea of closing her door. The interest which she inspired

was so profound and so genuine that the people who came to her house that evening were greatly distressed when they learned that it was impossible for her to receive them; then, with the outspoken curiosity which is a part of provincial manners, they inquired concerning the misfortune, the sorrow, or the disease which had afflicted Madame de Dey. To these questions, an old housekeeper called Brigitte replied that her mistress had shut herself into her room, and would not see anybody, not even her servants. The cloistral existence, so to speak, which the people of a small town lead, gives birth in them to such an unconquerable habit of analysing and commenting upon the actions of other people, that, after expressing their sympathy for Madame de Dey, without an idea whether she was really happy or unhappy, they all began to speculate upon the causes of her abrupt seclusion.

"If she were ill," said one curious individual, "she would have sent for the doctor;

but the doctor was at my house all day, playing chess. He said with a laugh that in these days there is but one disease, and that is unfortunately incurable."

This jest was put forward apologetically. Thereupon, men, women, old men, and maidens began to search the vast field of conjecture. Every one fancied that he caught a glimpse of a secret, and that secret engrossed the imaginations of them all. The next day, the suspicions became embittered. As life in a small town is open to all, the women were the first to learn that Brigitte had laid in more supplies than usual at the market. That fact could not be denied. Brigitte had been seen in the morning, in the square, and—a most extraordinary thing—she had bought the only hare that was offered for sale. Now the whole town knew that Madame de Dey did not like game. The hare became the starting-point for endless suppositions. When taking their daily walk, old men observed in the countess's house a sort of concentrated activity

which was made manifest by the very precautions which the servants took to conceal it. The valet was seen beating a rug in the garden; on the day before, no one would have paid any heed to it; but that rug became a link in the chain of evidence to support the romances which everybody was engaged in constructing. Every person had his own.

On the second day, when they learned that Madame de Dey proclaimed that she was indisposed, the principal persons of Carentan met in the evening at the house of the mayor's brother, an ex-merchant, a married man, of upright character and generally esteemed, and for whom the countess entertained a high regard. There all the aspirants to the rich widow's hand had a more or less probable story to tell; and each of them hoped to turn to his advantage the secret circumstances which forced her to compromise herself thus. The public accuser imagined a complete drama in which Madame de Dey's son was brought to her house by night. The mayor favoured the idea

of a priest who had not taken the oath, arriving from La Vendée and asking her for shelter; but the purchase of a hare on Friday embarrassed the mayor greatly. The president of the district was strong in his conviction that it was a leader of Chouans or of Vendeans hotly pursued. Others suggested a nobleman escaped from one of the prisons of Paris. In short, one and all suspected the countess of being guilty of one of those acts of generosity which the laws of that day stigmatised as crimes, and which might lead to the scaffold. The public accuser said in an undertone that they must hold their tongues, and try to snatch the unfortunate woman from the abyss towards which she was rapidly precipitating herself.

"If you talk about this business," he added, "I shall be obliged to interfere, to search her house, and then ——"

He did not finish his sentence, but they all understood his reticence.

The countess's sincere friends were so

alarmed for her that, during the morning of the third day, the procureur-syndic of the commune caused his wife to write her a note to urge her to receive as usual that evening. The old merchant, being bolder, called at Madame de Dey's house in the morning. Trusting in the service which he proposed to render her, he demanded to be shown to her presence, and was thunderstruck when he saw her in the garden, engaged in cutting the last flowers from the beds, to supply her vases.

"Doubtless she has been sheltering her lover," said the old man to himself, seized with compassion for the fascinating woman.

The strange expression on the countess's face confirmed him in his suspicions. Deeply touched by that devotion so natural to a woman, and which always moves our admiration, because all men are flattered by the sacrifices which a woman makes for a man, the merchant informed the countess of the reports which were current in the town, and of the dangerous position in which she stood.

"But," he said, as he concluded, "although there are some among our officials who are not indisposed to forgive you for an act of heroism of which a priest is the object, no one will pity you if they discover that you are sacrificing yourself to the affections of the heart."

At these words Madame de Dey looked at the old man with an expression of desperation and terror which made him shudder, old man though he was.

"Come," said she, taking his hand and leading him to her bedroom, where, after making sure that they were alone, she took from her bosom a soiled and wrinkled letter. "Read," she cried, making a violent effort to pronounce the word.

She fell into her chair as if utterly overwhelmed. While the old gentleman was feeling for his spectacles and wiping them, she fastened her eyes upon him and scrutinised him for the first time with curiosity; then she said softly, in an altered voice:

"I trust you."

"Am I not sharing your crime?" replied the old man, simply.

She started; for the first time her heart found itself in sympathy with another heart in that little town. The old merchant suddenly understood both the distress and the joy of the countess. Her son had taken part in the Granville expedition; he wrote to his mother from prison, imparting to her one sad but sweet hope. Having no doubt of his success in escaping, he mentioned three days in which he might appear at her house in disguise. The fatal letter contained heart-rending farewells in case he should not be at Carentan on the evening of the third day; and he begged his mother to hand a considerable sum of money to the messenger, who had undertaken to carry that letter to her through innumerable perils. The paper shook in the old man's hand.

"And this is the third day!" cried Madame de Dey, as she sprang to her feet, seized the letter, and began to pace the floor.

"You have been imprudent," said the merchant; "why did you lay in provisions?"

"Why, he may arrive almost starved, worn out with fatigue, and ——"

She did not finish.

"I am sure of my brother," said the old man, "and I will go and enlist him on your side."

In this emergency the old tradesman recovered the shrewdness which he had formerly displayed in his business, and gave advice instinct with prudence and sagacity. After agreeing upon all that they were both to say and to do, the old man went about, on cleverly devised pretexts, to the principal houses of Carentan, where he announced that Madame de Dey, whom he had just seen, would receive that evening in spite of her indisposition. Pitting his shrewdness against the inborn Norman cunning, in the examination to which each family subjected him in regard to the nature of the countess's illness, he succeeded in leading astray almost

everybody who was interested in that mysterious affair. His first visit produced a marvellous effect. He stated, in the presence of a gouty old lady, that Madame de Dey had nearly died of an attack of gout in the stomach; as the famous Tronchin had once recommended her, in such a case, to place on her chest the skin of a hare, flayed alive, and to stay in bed and not move, the countess, who had been at death's door two days before, having followed scrupulously Tronchin's advice, found herself sufficiently recovered to see those who cared to call on her that evening. That fable had a prodigious success, and the Carentan doctor, a royalist in secret, added to its effect by the air of authority with which he discussed the remedy. Nevertheless, suspicion had taken too deep root in the minds of some obstinate persons, or some philosophers, to be entirely dispelled; so that, in the evening, those who were regular habitués of Madame de Dey's salon arrived there early; some in order to watch her face, others from

friendly regard; and the majority were impressed by the marvellous nature of her recovery.

They found the countess seated at the corner of the huge fireplace of her salon, which was almost as modestly furnished as those of the people of Carentan; for, in order not to offend the sensitive self-esteem of her guests, she denied herself the luxury to which she had always been accustomed, and had changed nothing in her house. The floor of the reception-room was not even polished. She left old-fashioned dark tapestries on the walls, she retained the native furniture, burned tallow candles, and followed the customs of the town, espousing provincial life, and recoiling neither from the most rasping pettinesses nor the most unpleasant privations. But, realising that her guests would forgive her for any display of splendour which aimed at their personal comfort, she neglected nothing when it was a question of affording them enjoyment; so that she always gave them excellent dinners.

She even went so far as to make a pretence at miserliness, to please those calculating minds; and after causing certain concessions in the way of luxurious living to be extorted from her, she seemed to comply with a good grace.

About seven o'clock in the evening, therefore, the best of the uninteresting society of Carentan was assembled at her house, and formed a large circle about the fireplace. The mistress of the house, sustained in her misery by the compassionate glances which the old tradesman bestowed upon her, submitted with extraordinary courage to the minute questionings, the trivial and stupid reasoning of her guests. But at every blow of the knocker at her door, and whenever she heard footsteps in the street, she concealed her emotion by raising some question of interest to the welfare of the province. She started noisy discussions concerning the quality of the season's cider, and was so well seconded by her confidant that her company almost forgot to watch her, her manner was so natural

and her self-possession so imperturbable. The public accuser and one of the judges of the Revolutionary Tribunal sat silent, carefully watching every movement of her face and listening to every sound in the house, notwithstanding the uproar; and on several occasions they asked her very embarrassing questions, which, however, the countess answered with marvellous presence of mind. Mothers have such an inexhaustible store of courage! When Madame de Dey had arranged the card-tables, placed everybody at a table of boston, reversis, or whist, she remained a few moments talking with some young people, with the utmost nonchalance, playing her part like a consummate actress. She suggested a game of loto—said that she alone knew where it was, and disappeared.

"I am suffocating, my poor Brigitte!" she cried, wiping away the tears that gushed from her eyes, which gleamed with fever, anxiety, and impatience. "He does not come," she continued, looking about the chamber to

which she had flown. "Here, I breathe again and I live. A few moments more, and he will be here; for he still lives, I am certain; my heart tells me so! Do you hear nothing, Brigitte? Oh! I would give the rest of my life to know whether he is in prison or travelling through the country! I would like not to think ——"

She looked about again to make sure that everything was in order in the room. A bright fire was burning on the hearth; the shutters were carefully closed; the furniture glistened with cleanliness; the way in which the bed was made proved that the countess had assisted Brigitte in the smallest details; and her hopes betrayed themselves in the scrupulous care which seemed to have been taken in that room, where the sweet charm of love and its most chaste caresses exhaled in the perfume of the flowers. A mother alone could have anticipated the desires of a soldier, and have arranged to fulfil them all so perfectly. A dainty meal, choice wines, clean linen, and dry shoes — in a word, all that was likely to

be necessary or agreeable to a weary traveller was there set forth, so that he need lack nothing, so that the joy of home might make known to him a mother's love.

"Brigitte?" said the countess in a heart-rending tone, as she placed a chair at the table, as if to give reality to her longings, to intensify the strength of her illusions.

"Oh! he will come, madame; he is n't far away. I don't doubt that he 's alive and on his way here," replied Brigitte. "I put a key in the Bible and I held it on my fingers while Cottin read the Gospel of St. John; and, madame, the key did n't turn."

"Is that a sure sign?" asked the countess.

"Oh! it is certain, madame; I would wager my salvation that he is still alive. God can't make a mistake."

"Despite the danger that awaits him here, I would like right well to see him."

"Poor Monsieur Auguste!" cried Brigitte; "I suppose he is somewhere on the road, on foot!"

"And there is the church clock striking eight!" cried the countess, in dismay.

She was afraid that she had remained longer than she ought in that room, where she had faith in the life of her son because she looked upon all that meant life to him. She went down-stairs; but before entering the salon, she stood a moment in the vestibule, listening to see if any sound woke the silent echoes of the town. She smiled at Brigitte's husband, who was on sentry-duty, and whose eyes seemed dazed by dint of strained attention to the murmurs in the square and in the streets. She saw her son in everything and everywhere. In a moment she returned to the salon, affecting a jovial air, and began to play loto with some young girls; but from time to time she complained of feeling ill, and returned to her chair at the fireplace.

Such was the condition of persons and things in the house of Madame de Dey, while, on the road from Paris to Cherbourg, a young

man dressed in a dark carmagnole, the regulation costume at that period, strode along towards Carentan. At the beginning of the conscription, there was little or no discipline. The demands of the moment made it impossible for the Republic to equip all of its soldiers at once, and it was no rare thing to see the roads covered with conscripts still wearing their civilian dress. These young men marched in advance of their battalions to the halting-places, or loitered behind, for their progress was regulated by their ability to endure the fatigue of a long march.

The traveller with whom we have to do was some distance in advance of the column of conscripts on its way to Cherbourg, which the mayor of Carentan was momentarily expecting, in order to distribute lodging-tickets among them. The young man walked with a heavy but still firm step, and his bearing seemed to indicate that he had long been familiar with the hardships of military life. Although the moon was shining on the

pastures about Carentan, he had noticed some great white clouds which seemed on the point of discharging snow upon the country, and the fear of being surprised by a storm doubtless quickened his gait, which was more rapid than his weariness made comfortable. He had an almost empty knapsack on his back, and carried in his hand a boxwood cane, cut from one of the high, broad hedges formed by that shrub around most of the estates in Lower Normandy. The solitary traveller entered Carentan, whose towers, of fantastic aspect in the moonlight, had appeared to him a moment before. His steps awoke the echoes of the silent streets, where he met no one; he was obliged to ask a weaver who was still at work to point out the mayor's abode. That magistrate lived only a short distance away, and the conscript soon found himself safe under the porch of his house, where he seated himself on a stone bench, waiting for the lodging-ticket which he had asked for. But, being summoned by

the mayor, he appeared before him, and was subjected to a careful examination. The soldier was a young man of attractive appearance, who apparently belonged to some family of distinction. His manner indicated noble birth, and the intelligence due to a good education was manifest in his features.

"What is your name?" the mayor asked, with a shrewd glance at him.

"Julien Jussieu," replied the conscript.

"And you come from ——?" said the magistrate, with an incredulous smile.

"From Paris."

"Your comrades must be far behind?" continued the Norman in a mocking tone.

"I am three leagues ahead of the battalion."

"Doubtless some sentimental reason brings you to Carentan, citizen conscript?" queried the mayor, slyly. "It is all right," he added, imposing silence, with a wave of the hand, upon the young man, who was about to speak. "We know where to send you.

Here," he said, handing him the lodging-ticket; "here, *Citizen Jussieu.*"

There was a perceptible tinge of irony in the tone in which the magistrate uttered these last two words, as he held out a ticket upon which Madame de Dey's name was written. The young man read the address with an air of curiosity.

"He knows very well that he has n't far to go, and when he gets outside, it won 't take him long to cross the square," cried the mayor, speaking to himself, while the young man went out. "He 's a bold young fellow. May God protect him! He has an answer for everything. However, if any other than I had asked to see his papers, he would have been lost!"

At that moment the clock of Carentan struck half past nine; the torches were being lighted in Madame de Dey's anteroom, and the servants were assisting their masters and mistresses to put on their cloaks, their overcoats, and their mantles; the card-players had

settled their accounts and were about to withdraw in a body, according to the usual custom in all small towns.

"It seems that the public accuser proposes to remain," said a lady, observing that that important functionary was missing when they were about to separate to seek their respective homes, after exhausting all the formulas of leave-taking.

The redoubtable magistrate was in fact alone with the countess, who waited in fear and trembling until it should please him to go.

"Citizeness," he said at length, after a long silence in which there was something horrible, "I am here to see that the laws of the Republic are observed."

Madame de Dey shuddered.

"Have you no revelations to make to me?" he demanded.

"None," she replied in amazement.

"Ah, madame!" cried the accuser, sitting down beside her and changing his tone, "at this moment, for lack of a word, either you

or I may bring our heads to the scaffold. I have observed your temperament, your heart, your manners, too closely to share the error into which you have led your guests to-night. You are expecting your son, I am absolutely certain."

The countess made a gesture of denial; but she had turned pale, the muscles of her face had contracted, by virtue of the overpowering necessity to display a deceitful calmness, and the accuser's implacable eye lost none of her movements.

"Very well; receive him," continued the revolutionary magistrate; "but do not let him remain under your roof later than seven o'clock in the morning. At daybreak I shall come here armed with a denunciation which I shall procure."

She gazed at him with a stupefied air, which would have aroused the pity of a tigress.

"I shall prove," he said in a gentle tone, "the falseness of the denunciation by a thorough search, and the nature of my report will

place you out of the reach of any future suspicion. I shall speak of your patriotic gifts, of your true citizenship, and we shall *all* be saved."

Madame de Dey feared a trap; she did not move, but her face was on fire and her tongue was frozen. A blow of the knocker rang through the house.

"Ah!" cried the terrified mother, falling on her knees. "Save him! save him!"

"Yes, let us save him," rejoined the public accuser, with a passionate glance at her; "let us save him though it cost *us* our lives."

"I am lost!" she cried, while the accuser courteously raised her.

"O madame!" he replied with a grand oratorical gesture, "I do not choose to owe you to any one but yourself."

"Madame, here he——" cried Brigitte, who thought that her mistress was alone.

At sight of the public accuser, the old servant, whose face was flushed with joy, became rigid and deathly pale.

"What is it, Brigitte?" asked the magistrate, in a mild and meaning tone.

"A conscript that the mayor has sent here to lodge," replied the servant, showing the ticket.

"That is true," said the accuser, after reading the paper; "a battalion is to arrive here to-night."

And he went out.

The countess was too anxious at that moment to believe in the sincerity of her former attorney to entertain the slightest suspicion; she ran swiftly up-stairs, having barely strength enough to stand upright; then she opened the door of her bedroom, saw her son, and rushed into his arms, well-nigh lifeless.

"O my son, my son!" she cried, sobbing, and covering him with frenzied kisses.

"Madame ——" said the stranger.

"Oh! it isn't he!" she cried, stepping back in dismay and standing before the conscript, at whom she gazed with a haggard expression.

"Blessed Lord God, what a resemblance!" said Brigitte.

There was a moment's silence, and the stranger himself shuddered at the aspect of Madame de Dey.

"Ah, monsieur!" she said, leaning upon Brigitte's husband, and feeling then in all its force the grief of which the first pang had almost killed her; "monsieur, I cannot endure to see you any longer; allow my servants to take my place and to attend to your wants."

She went down to her own apartments, half carried by Brigitte and her old servant.

"What, madame!" cried the maid, "is that man going to sleep in Monsieur Auguste's bed, wear Monsieur Auguste's slippers, eat the pie that I made for Monsieur Auguste? They may guillotine me, but I——"

"Brigitte!" cried Madame de Dey.

"Hold your tongue, chatterbox!" said her husband in a low voice; "do you want to kill madame?"

At that moment the conscript made a noise in his room, drawing his chair to the table.

" I will not stay here," cried Madame de Dey; "I will go to the greenhouse, where I can hear better what goes on outside during the night."

She was still wavering between fear of having lost her son and the hope of seeing him appear. The night was disquietingly silent. There was one ghastly moment for the countess, when the battalion of conscripts marched into the town, and each man repaired to his lodging. There were disappointed hopes at every footstep and every sound; then nature resumed its terrible tranquillity. Towards morning the countess was obliged to return to her room. Brigitte, who watched her mistress every moment, finding that she did not come out again, went to her room and found the countess dead.

"She probably heard the conscript dressing and walking about in Monsieur Auguste's room, singing their d——d *Marseillaise* as if

he were in a stable!" cried Brigitte. "It was that which killed her!"

The countess's death was caused by a more intense emotion, and probably by some terrible vision. At the precise moment when Madame de Dey died at Carentan, her son was shot in Le Morbihan. We might add this tragic story to the mass of other observations on that sympathy which defies the law of space — documents which some few solitary scholars are collecting with scientific curiosity, and which will one day serve as basis for a new science, a science which till now has lacked only its man of genius.

1831.

A Passion in the Desert

A Passion in the Desert

"THE sight was fearful!" she cried, as we left the menagerie of Monsieur Martin. She had been watching that daring performer *work* with his hyena, to speak in the style of the posters.

"How on earth," she continued, "can he have tamed his animals so as to be sure enough of their affection to——"

"That fact, which seems to you a problem," I replied, interrupting her, "is, however, perfectly natural."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, while an incredulous smile flickered on her lip.

"Do you mean to say that you think that beasts are entirely devoid of passions?" I asked her. "Let me tell you that we can safely give them credit for all the vices due to our state of civilisation."

She looked at me with an air of astonishment.

"But," I continued, "when I first saw Monsieur Martin, I admit that I exclaimed in surprise, as you did. I happened to be beside an old soldier who had lost his right leg, and who had gone into the menagerie with me. His face had struck me. It was one of those dauntless faces, stamped with the seal of war, upon which Napoleon's battles are written. That old trooper had above all a frank and joyous manner, which always prejudices me favourably. Doubtless he was one of those fellows whom nothing surprises, who find food for laughter in the last contortions of a comrade, whom they bury or strip merrily; who defy cannon-balls fearlessly, who never deliberate long, and who would fraternise with the devil. After looking closely at the proprietor of the menagerie as he came out of the dressing-room, my companion curled his lip, expressing disdain by that sort of meaning glance which superior men affect in order to dis-

tinguish themselves from dupes. And so, when I waxed enthusiastic over Monsieur Martin's courage, he smiled and said to me with a knowing look, shaking his head: 'I know all about it!'

"'What? You do?' I replied. 'If you will explain what you mean, I shall be very much obliged.'

"After a few moments, during which we introduced ourselves, we went to dine at the first restaurant that we saw. At dessert, a bottle of champagne made that interesting old soldier's memory perfectly clear. He told me his history, and I saw that he was justified in exclaiming: 'I know all about it!'"

When we reached her house, she teased me so, and made me so many promises, that I consented to repeat to her the soldier's story. And so the next day she received this episode of an epic which might be entitled *The French in Egypt.*

At the time of General Desaix's expedition

to Upper Egypt, a Provençal soldier, having fallen into the hands of the Maugrabins, was taken by those Arabs to the desert which lies beyond the cataracts of the Nile. In order to place between themselves and the French army a sufficient space to ensure their safety, the Maugrabins made a forced march and did not halt until dark. They camped about a well, concealed by palm-trees, near which they had previously buried some provisions. Having no idea that the thought of flight would ever occur to their prisoner, they simply bound his hands, and one and all went to sleep, after eating a few dates and giving their horses some barley. When the bold Provençal saw that his enemies had ceased to watch him, he made use of his teeth to get possession of a scimitar; then, using his knees to hold the blade in place, he cut the cords which prevented him from using his hands, and was free. He at once seized a carbine and a poniard, and took the precaution to lay in a supply of dried dates, a small bag of barley, and some

powder and ball; then he strapped a scimitar about his waist, mounted a horse, and rode swiftly away in the direction in which he supposed the French army to be. In his haste to reach camp, he urged his already tired beast so hard that the poor creature died, his flanks torn to shreds, leaving the Frenchman in the midst of the desert.

After walking through the sand for a long time, with the courage of an escaping convict, the soldier was obliged to stop; the day was drawing to a close. Despite the beauty of the sky of an Eastern night, he did not feel strong enough to go on. Luckily he had been able to reach an elevation, on top of which rose a few palm-trees, whose foliage, seen long before, had aroused the sweetest hope in his heart. His weariness was so great that he lay down upon a rock shaped like a camp-bed, and fell asleep there without taking the least precaution to protect himself while asleep. The loss of his life seemed inevitable, and his last thought was a regret. He had

already repented of having left the Maugrabins, whose wandering life had begun to seem delightful to him since he was far away from them and helpless.

He was awakened by the sun, whose pitiless rays, falling perpendicularly upon the granite, caused an intolerable heat. For the Provençal had been foolish enough to lie on the side opposite the shadow cast by the majestic and verdant fronds of the palm-trees. He looked at those solitary trunks, and shuddered. They reminded him of the graceful shafts, crowned with long leaves, for which the columns of the Saracen cathedral at Arles are noted. But when, after counting the palm-trees, he glanced about him, the most ghastly despair settled about his heart. He saw a boundless ocean; the sombre sands of the desert stretched away in every direction as far as the eye could see, and glittered like a steel blade in a bright light. He did not know whether it was a sea of glass or a succession of lakes as smooth as a mirror. Ris-

ing in waves, a fiery vapour whirled above that quivering soil. The sky shone with a resplendent Oriental glare, of discouraging purity, for it left nothing for the imagination to desire. Sky and earth were aflame. The silence terrified by its wild and desolate majesty. The infinite, vast expanse weighed upon the soul from every side; not a cloud in the sky, not a breath in the air, not a rift on the surface of the sand, which seemed to move in tiny waves; and the horizon terminated, as at sea in fine weather, with a line of light as slender as the edge of a sword. The Provençal embraced the trunk of a palm-tree as if it were the body of a friend; then, sheltered by the straight, slender shadow which the tree cast upon the stone, he wept, seated himself anew, and remained there, gazing with profound melancholy at the implacable scene before his eyes. He shouted as if to tempt the solitude. His voice, lost in the hollows of the hillock, made in the distance a faint sound which awoke no

echo; the echo was in his heart. The Provençal was twenty-two years old; he cocked his carbine.

"I shall have time enough for that!" he said to himself, as he placed the weapon on the ground.

Gazing alternately at the dark stretch of sand and the blue expanse of the sky, the soldier dreamed of France. He smelt with a thrill of rapture the gutters of Paris, he recalled the towns through which he had marched, the faces of his comrades, the most trivial details of his life. In truth, his southern imagination soon brought before him the stones of his dear Provence, in the eddying waves of heat which shimmered above the vast sheet of the desert. Dreading all the perils of that cruel mirage, he descended the slope opposite that by which he had ascended the mound the night before. He was overjoyed to discover a sort of cave, hollowed out by nature in the huge fragments of granite which formed the base of that hillock. The remains of a mat indicated that

the shelter had once been inhabited. Then, a few steps away, he saw some palm-trees laden with dates. At that sight the instinct which attaches us to life reawoke in his heart. He hoped to live long enough to await the passing of some Maugrabins; or perhaps he should soon hear the roar of cannon; for at that moment Bonaparte was marching through Egypt. Revived by that thought, the Frenchman shook down several clusters of ripe fruit, beneath the weight of which the trees seemed to bend, and he assured himself, on tasting that unlooked-for manna, that the previous occupant of the grotto had cultivated the palm-trees; in truth, the fresh and toothsome flesh of the dates demonstrated the care of his predecessor. The Provençal passed abruptly from the gloomiest despair to the most frantic joy.

He returned to the top of the hill, and employed himself during the rest of the day cutting down one of the sterile palm-trees, which had served him for a roof the night

before. A vague memory brought to his mind the beasts of the desert, and, anticipating that they might come to drink at the spring which gushed out of the sand at the foot of the bowlders, he determined to guard himself against their visits by placing a barrier against the door of his hermitage. Despite his zeal, despite the strength which the fear of being eaten up during his sleep gave him, it was impossible for him to cut the palm-tree into pieces during that day, but he succeeded in felling it. When, towards evening, that king of the desert fell, the noise of its fall echoed in the distance, and the solitude uttered a sort of moan; the soldier shuddered as if he had heard a voice predicting disaster. But like an heir who does not mourn long over the death of his parent, he stripped that noble tree of the great green leaves which are its poetic adornment, and used them to repair the mat, upon which he lay down to sleep. Fatigued by the heat and hard work, he fell asleep beneath the red vault of the grotto.

A Passion in the Desert

In the middle of the night, his slumber was disturbed by a peculiar noise. He sat up, and the profound silence which prevailed enabled him to recognise a breathing whose savage energy could not belong to a human being. A terrible fear, increased by the dark, the silence, and the bewilderment of the first waking moments, froze his heart. Indeed, he already felt the painful contraction of his hair, when, by dint of straining his eyes, he perceived in the darkness two faint amber lights. At first he attributed those lights to the reflection of his own eyes; but soon, the brilliancy of the night assisting him little by little to distinguish the objects in the cavern, he discovered a huge beast lying within two yards of him. Was it a lion? Was it a tiger? Was it a crocodile?

The Provençal had not enough education to know to what species his companion belonged; but his terror was the more violent in that his ignorance led him to imagine all sorts of calamities at once. He endured the

fiendish tortures of listening, of noticing the irregularities of that breathing, without losing a sound, and without daring to make the slightest motion. An odour as pungent as that given forth by foxes, but more penetrating, more weighty, so to speak, filled the cave; and when the Provençal had smelled it, his terror reached its height, for he could no longer doubt the nature of the terrible companion whose royal den he had appropriated for a camp. Soon the reflection of the moon, which was sinking rapidly towards the horizon, lighted up the den, and little by little illuminated the spotted skin of a panther.

The lion of Egypt was asleep, curled up like a huge dog in peaceable possession of a luxuriant kennel at the door of a palace; its eyes, which had opened for a moment, had closed again. Its head was turned towards the Frenchman. A thousand conflicting thoughts passed through the mind of the panther's prisoner; at first, he thought of killing her with

his carbine; but he saw that there was not room enough between himself and the beast for him to take aim; the end of the barrel would have reached beyond the panther. And suppose she should wake? That supposition kept him perfectly still. As he listened to his heart beat in the silence, he cursed the too violent pulsations caused by the rushing of his blood, fearing lest they should disturb that slumber which enabled him to devise some plan of escape. Twice he put his hand to his scimitar, with the idea of cutting off his enemy's head; but the difficulty of cutting through the close-haired skin made him abandon the bold project. "If I missed, it would be sure death," he thought.

He preferred the chances of a fight, and determined to wait for daylight. And the day was not long in coming. Then the Frenchman was able to examine the beast; its muzzle was stained with blood.

"It has eaten a good meal," thought he, undisturbed as to whether the meal had been

of human flesh or not; "it will not be hungry when it wakes."

It was a female; the hair on the stomach and thighs was a dazzling white. A number of little spots, like velvet, formed dainty bracelets around her paws. The muscular tail was white also, but ended in black rings. The upper part of the coat, yellow as unpolished gold, but very smooth and soft, bore the characteristic marking of rose-shaped spots which serve to distinguish panthers from other varieties of the feline family. That placid but formidable hostess lay snoring in an attitude as graceful as that of a cat lying on the cushion of an ottoman. Her blood-stained paws, muscular and provided with sharp claws, were above her head, which rested on them; and from her muzzle projected a few straight hairs called whiskers, like silver thread. If he had seen her thus in a cage, the Provençal would certainly have admired the beast's grace and the striking contrast of the bright colours which gave to her coat an

imperial gloss and splendour; but at that moment, his eyes were bewildered by that terrible sight. The presence of the panther, even though asleep, produced upon him the effect which the snake's magnetic eyes are said to produce upon the nightingale. For a moment the soldier's courage oozed away before that danger; whereas it would doubtless have been raised to its highest pitch before the mouths of cannon vomiting shot and shell. However, a bold thought entered his mind and froze at its source the cold perspiration which stood on his brow. Acting like those men who, driven to the wall by misfortune, defy death and offer themselves defenceless to its blows, he detected in that adventure a tragedy which he could not understand, and resolved to play his part with honour to the last.

"The Arabs might have killed me day before yesterday," he thought.

Looking upon himself as dead, he waited with anxious curiosity for his enemy to wake.

When the sun appeared, the panther suddenly opened her eyes; then she stretched her paws, as if to limber them and to rid herself of the cramp; finally she yawned, showing her terrifying arsenal of teeth, and her cloven tongue, hard as a file.

"She is like a dainty woman!" thought the Frenchman, as he watched her roll about and go through the prettiest and most coquettish movements.

She licked off the blood which stained her paws and her nose, and scratched her head again and again, with the most graceful of gestures.

"Good! give a little attention to your toilet!" said the Frenchman to himself, his gayety returning with his courage; "in a moment we will bid each other good day."

And he grasped the short poniard which he had taken from the Maugrabins.

At that moment the panther turned her face towards the Frenchman and gazed steadfastly at him without moving. The rigidity of her

steely eyes, and their unendurable brilliancy, made the Provençal shudder, especially when the beast walked towards him; but he gazed at her with a caressing expression, and smiling at her as if to magnetise her, allowed her to come close to him; then, with a touch as gentle and loving as if he were caressing the fairest of women, he passed his hand over her whole body from head to tail, scratching with his nails the flexible vertebræ which formed the panther's yellow back. The animal stiffened her tail with pleasure, her eyes became softer; and when the Frenchman performed that self-interested caress for the third time, she began to purr, as cats do to express pleasure; but the sound came forth from a throat so deep and so powerful that it rang through the grotto like the last notes of an organ through a church. The Provençal, realising the importance of his caresses, repeated them in a way to soothe, to lull the imperious courtesan. When he felt sure that he had allayed the ferocity of his capricious

companion, whose hunger had certainly been sated the night before, he rose and started to leave the grotto. The panther allowed him to go; but, when he had climbed the hill, she bounded after him as lightly as a sparrow hops from branch to branch, and rubbed against his legs, curving her back after the manner of a cat; then, looking into her guest's face with an eye whose glare had become less deadly, she uttered that wild cry which naturalists liken to the noise made by a saw.

"She is very exacting!" exclaimed the Frenchman, with a smile.

He tried playing with her ears, patting her sides, and scratching her head hard with his nails; and finding that he was successful, he tickled her skull with the point of his dagger, watching for an opportunity to kill her, but the hardness of the bones made him afraid that he might not succeed.

The sultana of the desert approved her slave's talents by raising her head, stretching

out her neck, and demonstrating her delight by the tranquillity of her manner. Suddenly the Frenchman thought that to murder with a single blow that savage princess he would have to stab her in the throat, and he had already raised his blade, when the panther, satiated no doubt, gracefully lay down at his feet, casting on him from time to time glances in which, despite their natural savagery, there was a vague expression of kindness. The poor Provençal ate his dates, leaning against one of the palm-trees; but he gazed by turns at the desert in search of rescuers, and at his terrible companion to observe the progress of her uncertain kindness. The panther watched the place where the date-stones fell, whenever he threw one away, and her eyes then expressed a most extraordinary degree of suspicion. She examined the Frenchman with the prudent scrutiny of a tradesman; but that scrutiny was evidently favourable to him, for, when he had finished his meagre meal, she licked his shoes, and with her rough, strong

tongue removed as by a miracle the dust that had become caked in the creases of the leather.

"But what will happen when she is hungry?" thought the Provençal. Despite the shudder caused by that idea, the soldier began to observe with a curious ardour the proportions of the panther, certainly one of the finest examples of the species; for she was three feet in height, and four feet long, not including the tail. That powerful weapon, as round as a club, measured nearly three feet. The face, which was as large as a lioness's, was distinguished by an expression of extraordinary shrewdness; the unfeeling cruelty of the tiger was predominant therein, but there was also a vague resemblance to the face of an artful woman. At that moment, that solitary queen's features disclosed a sort of merriment like that of Nero in his cups; she had quenched her thirst in blood, and was inclined to play. The soldier tried to come and go; the panther allowed him to do as he pleased, contenting herself with following him with her

eyes, resembling not so much a faithful dog as a great Angora cat, distrustful of everything, even her master's movements. When he turned, he saw beside the spring the remains of his horse; the panther had brought the body all that distance. About two-thirds of it were consumed. That spectacle encouraged the Frenchman. It was easy then for him to explain the panther's absence and the forbearance with which she had treated him during his sleep. Emboldened by his good fortune to tempt the future, he conceived the wild hope of living on good terms with the panther from day to day, neglecting no method of taming her and of winning her good graces.

He returned to her side and had the indescribable joy of seeing her move her tail with an almost imperceptible movement. Thereupon he sat down fearlessly beside her and they began to play together: he patted her paws and her nose, twisted her ears, threw her over on her back, and scratched roughly her soft, warm flanks. She made no

objection, and when the soldier attempted to smooth the hair on her paws, she carefully withdrew her nails, which were curved like Damascus blades. The Frenchman, who had one hand on his dagger, was still thinking of thrusting it into the side of the too trustful panther; but he was afraid of being strangled in her last convulsions. Moreover, he had in his heart a sort of remorse, enjoining upon him to respect a harmless creature. It seemed to him that he had found a friend in that boundless desert.

Involuntarily he thought of his first sweetheart, whom he had nicknamed Mignonne, by antiphrasis, because she was so fiendishly jealous that, throughout all the time that their intercourse lasted, he had to be on his guard against the knife with which she constantly threatened him. That memory of his youth suggested to him the idea of trying to make the young panther answer to that name; he admired her agility, her grace, and her gentleness with less terror now.

Towards the close of the day, he had become accustomed to his hazardous situation and he was almost in love with its dangers. His companion had finally caught the habit of turning to him when he called, in a falsetto voice:

"Mignonne!"

At sunset, Mignonne repeated several times a deep and melancholy cry.

"She has been well brought up," thought the light-hearted soldier, "she is saying her prayers."

But that unspoken jest only came into his mind when he noticed the peaceful attitude which his companion maintained.

"Come, my pretty blonde, I will let you go to bed first," he said, relying upon the agility of his legs to escape as soon as she slept, and trusting to find another resting-place for the night.

He waited impatiently for the right moment for his flight; and when it came, he walked rapidly towards the Nile; but he had travelled barely a quarter of a league through

the sand, when he heard the panther bounding after him, and uttering at intervals that sawlike cry, which was even more alarming than the heavy thud of her bounds.

"Well, well!" he said, "she has really taken a fancy to me! It may be that this young panther has never met a man before; it is flattering to possess her first love!"

At that moment he stepped into one of those quicksands which are so perilous to travellers, and from which it is impossible to extricate one's self. Feeling that he was caught, he uttered a cry of alarm; the panther seized him by the collar with her teeth, and with a powerful backward leap rescued him from death as if by magic.

"Ah!" cried the soldier, caressing her enthusiastically, "it 's a matter of life or death between us now, Mignonne! — But no tricks!"

Then he retraced his steps.

From that moment the desert was, as it were, peopled for him. It contained a living creature

to whom the Frenchman could talk, and whose ferocity was moderated for him, without any comprehension on his part of the reasons for that extraordinary friendship. However desirous the soldier was to remain up and on his guard, he fell asleep. When he awoke he saw nothing of Mignonne; he ascended the hill, and saw her in the far distance, bounding along according to the custom of these animals, which are prevented from running by the extreme flexibility of their spinal column. Mignonne arrived with bloody chops; she received her companion's proffered caresses, manifesting her delight by reiterated and deep purrs. Her eyes, full of languor, rested with even more mildness than before on the Provençal, who spoke to her as to a domestic animal:

"Aha! mademoiselle — for you are a good girl, are n't you? Upon my word! how we like to be patted! Are n't you ashamed! Have you been eating up some Arab? Never mind! they 're animals like

yourself. But don't go eating Frenchmen, at all events. If you do, I shall not love you any more!"

She played as a huge puppy plays with its master, allowing him to roll her over and pat her by turns, and sometimes she challenged him, by putting her paw upon him, with an appealing gesture.

Several days passed thus. That companionship enabled the Provençal to admire the sublime beauties of the desert. From the moment that he found there moments of dread and of security, food to eat, and a creature of whom he could think, his mind was excited by contrasts. It was a life full of opposing sensations. Solitude made manifest all its secrets to him, enveloped him in all its charm. He discovered spectacles unknown to the world, in the rising and setting of the sun. He started when he heard above his head the soft whirring of the wings of a bird—rare visitant!—or when he watched the clouds melt together—ever-changing, many-tinted voy-

agers! During the night he studied the effects of the moon on the ocean of sand, where the simoom produced waves and undulations and swift changes. He lived in the gorgeous light of the Orient, he admired its wonderful splendours; and often, after enjoying the awful spectacle of a storm on that plain, where the sand rose in a dry, red mist, in death-dealing clouds, he rejoiced at the approach of night, for then the delicious coolness of the stars fell upon the earth. He listened to imaginary music in the skies. Solitude taught him, too, to seek the treasures of reverie. He passed whole hours recalling trifles, comparing his past life with his present one. Lastly, he conceived a warm regard for his panther, for affection was a necessity to him.

Whether it was that his will, magnetically strong, had changed his companion's disposition, or that she found abundant food, because of the constant battles which were taking place in those deserts, she spared the Frenchman's life, and he finally ceased to distrust

her when he found that she had become so tame. He employed most of his time in sleeping; but he was obliged to watch at times, like a spider in the midst of its web, in order not to allow the moment of his deliverance to escape, if any human being should pass through the circle described by the horizon. He had sacrificed his shirt to make a flag, which he had hoisted to the top of a leafless palm-tree. Advised by necessity, he invented a way to keep it unfolded by the use of sticks, for the wind might not have stirred it at the moment when the expected traveller should look across the desert.

But it was during the long hours when hope abandoned him that he played with the panther. He had ended by learning the different inflections of her voice, the different expressions of her eyes; he had studied all the gradations of colour of her golden coat. Mignonne no longer even growled when he seized the tuft of hair at the end of her redoubtable tail, to count the black and white

rings—a graceful ornament, which shone in the sunlight like precious stones. He took pleasure in gazing at the graceful and voluptuous lines of her figure, and the whiteness of her stomach, as well as the shapeliness of her head. But it was especially when she was playing that he delighted in watching her, and the youthful agility of her movements always surprised him. He admired her suppleness when she bounded, crept, glided, crouched, clung, rolled over and over, darted hither and thither. However swift her bound, however slippery the bowlder, she always stopped short at the word "Mignonne."

One day, in the dazzling sunlight, an enormous bird hovered in the sky. The Provençal left his panther to scrutinise that new guest; but after waiting a moment, his neglected sultana uttered a low growl.

"God forgive me, I believe that she is jealous!" he cried, seeing that her eyes had become steely once more. "Surely Virginie's soul has passed into that body!"

The eagle disappeared while the soldier was admiring the panther's rounded flank. There was so much youthful grace in her outlines! She was as pretty as a woman. The light fur of her coat blended by delicate shades with the dead-white of her thighs. The vivid sunshine caused that living gold, those brown spots, to gleam in such wise as to make them indescribably charming. The Provençal and his panther gazed at each other with an air of comprehension; the coquette started when she felt her friend's nails scratching her head; her eyes shone like flashes of lightning, then she closed them tight.

"She has a soul!" he cried, as he studied the tranquil repose of that queen of the sands, white as their pulsing light, solitary and burning as they.

"Well," she said to me, "I have read your argument in favour of wild beasts; but how did two persons so well fitted to understand each other finally come out?"

"'Ah! there you are! It ended as all great passions do, by a misunderstanding. Each believes in some treachery; one refrains from explaining from pride, the other quarrels from obstinacy."

"And sometimes, at the happiest moment," she said; "a glance, an exclamation is enough — well, finish your story."

"It is very difficult, but you will understand what the old veteran had already confided to me, when, as he finished his bottle of champagne, he exclaimed:

"'I don't know how I hurt her, but she turned as if she had gone mad, and wounded my thigh with her sharp teeth — a slight wound. I, thinking that she meant to devour me, plunged my dagger into her throat. She rolled over with a cry which tore my soul; I saw her struggle, gazing at me without a trace of anger. I would have given anything in the world, even my cross, which I had not then earned, to restore her to life again. It was as if I had murdered a human being; and

the soldiers who had seen my flag and who hurried to my rescue found me weeping. Well, monsieur,' he continued, after a moment's silence, 'since then I have fought in Germany, Spain, Russia, and France; I have marched my poor old bones about, but I have seen nothing comparable to the desert. Ah, that is magnificent, I tell you!'

"'What were your feelings there?' I asked.

"'Oh, they cannot be told, young man. Besides, I do not always regret my panther and my palm-tree oasis: I must be very sad for that. But I will tell you this: in the desert there is all—and yet nothing.'

"'Stay!—explain that.'

"'Well, then,' he said, with a gesture of impatience, 'God is there, and man is not.'"

1830.